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Joanna Barratt

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We Are Being Watched

by Joanna Barratt

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Introduction

Are you SMART? Do you have a SMART phone? A SMART meter? Do you even know what SMART means? Well, it's an acronym. SMART stands for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Scary!

I've met so many people who seem to be paranoid about what's going on in the world today. They're afraid of SMART phones, credit/debit cards, Facebook, WhatsApp, but have missed the fact that they were already tagged from the very day their arrival into this world was registered with the government and a birth certificate was issued to them. Do you know that by having a birth certificate and national insurance number you became an asset? You are held as collateral against the debt your country owes to international bankers. Some countries are more

severe in their surveillance systems than others, but the whole world is becoming more and more trapped.

God has been gracious in these end days by giving us this practical example and experience to help us understand what's going on in the spiritual realm.

We think we're free ... but we're not!

It doesn't stop there. If you fear the world watching our every move, how much more should we fear the 24/7 scrutiny of God? Read these scriptures slowly:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...

2 Corinthians 5:10-11

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nought your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12

God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God.

Romans 2:6-11

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Galatians 6:7-8

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead

which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

Revelation 20:12-13

Negative? Very! Until we realise what God has graciously done for those who's eyes are opened and not only see themselves but also realise they're doomed without Jesus.

We're all slaves. Slaves to someone whether we adhere to it or not. The Bible says that the Devil takes the world captive at his will, but for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, their Redeemer, we've been delivered from his power and this worldly system and now belong to Jesus.

Who (Jesus) gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

Galatians 1:4

Jesus told his disciples:

And he said unto them, Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.

Mark 16:15-16

The gospel is the good news that there is forgiveness for all the sins we have ever committed if we cry out to Jesus (who was completely sinless) and accept the sacrifice he made when he died on a cross 2000 years ago for all mankind. Forgiveness is a free gift:

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23

But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Romans 5:8-11

The problem is that we can use or abuse God's gracious gift of redemption, that's why he doesn't reveal himself to everyone. He's hoping that we will love him back for the love he's shown us, and

prove that we both understand what he's done, and are truly grateful. We are now expected to change our lifestyle to live lives that will honour God, our heavenly father.

We Are Not Our Own

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:20

Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

1 Corinthians 7:23

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness (unbridled lust and wantonness), lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

1 Peter 4:2-5

Paul knew that all his efforts to live a life worthy of his calling was an acceptable sacrifice where God was concerned and that, even though he was being watched 24/7, God saw his heart and knew that Paul wanted to serve him with every fibre of his being. Rather than being afraid of facing Jesus he was looking forward to it because he knew he would be with his Lord and master and would be rewarded for every sacrifice he'd ever made.

This is what he said at the end of his life:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.

James 1:12

Chapter 1

Oh, For A Gentle Tongue

I've already written in other books about **gentleness** but I want to write further about it as I feel this is such a difficult quality to both obtain and exercise.

We've all been physically wounded at some point in our lives, whether it's just falling over and grazing a knee or, worse still, breaking a bone. And it's been of great importance to us that someone treated us gently so as not to add more pain to our injury. Some nurses are ham-fisted and just do what's practical to get the job done, but others have a wonderful bedside manner and treat their patients with real tenderness, being concerned for both their emotional and physical well-being. You

all probably know what I'm talking about when I say a visit to the dentist can be either comfortable or sheer torture, depending on who's holding that drill and working on you.

We try to teach children from a very young age to be gentle, especially when a new born baby or very young animal is introduced into the family. We sit a young sibling in a chair propping up pillows all around before placing their tiny baby brother or sister into their arms telling them, "Now be very gentle. You have to be very gentle with little babies," as we teach them the difference between physical strength and weakness. But very often we fail to teach them how damaging words can be.

Bullying Is Painful

Verbal bullying is very real and can be traumatic for children who are on the receiving end in their school, and so many children have been stunted emotionally because of words spoken over them by their parents, such as, "You're useless", "You're stupid", "You'll never make it", "You'll never amount to anything".

I struggled with the inability to be gentle with my tongue for many years because I was brought up in a home where we were brutally honest and talked straight, and the harder we hit verbally the better we

felt because it was always important for us to win an argument. There's a scripture in Proverbs 15 which says:

A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

My problem was that I knew too many grievous words and didn't have a clue about the soft options. My tongue was in no way gentle.

In James 3 the apostle says that:

If any man offend not in word, that same man is a perfect man, and able also to bridle, or control, his whole body. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature.

From James 3:2-6

Words come out of our mouths before we've even managed to get our brain into gear, and it's set on fire of hell, meaning the devil takes full advantage of any opportunity we give him. James goes on to say that man has tamed all manner of ferocious animals and creatures, but no man has yet managed to tame the tongue; it's an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Out of the same mouth we bless

God and curse men, we do it without thinking – but this ought not to be.

Thumper Knows Best

Have you seen the Disney film, 'Bambi'? Well I remember a comment which Thumper, the rabbit, made one day to Bambi who was a very young deer. He said, in his American twang, words to this effect, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all!"

It made me think of an incident in the Bible where Jesus had a discussion with his disciples in the upper room just before he was arrested? Jesus prophesied that one of his intimate twelve disciples was about to betray him and immediately they all began to enquire among themselves which one of them it was that should do this thing. Then Peter, who loved Jesus dearly, made a loyal declaration...

And Peter said unto Jesus, Lord, I'm ready to go with you, both into prison, and to death. And Jesus said, I'm telling you, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before you shall deny three times that you even know me.

Luke 22:33-34

That must have truly hurt Peter.

After they had finished the Passover Meal the disciples and Jesus left the upper room to go to the garden of Gethsemane together. Jesus knew the time had come for him to fulfil God's purpose and he desperately needed to pray to his Heavenly Father. It was after his prayer, and the angel had strengthening him, that the Roman soldiers, together with the chief priests, the captains of the temple, and the elders, came to arrest him. Peter tried in the garden to prove his loyalty to Jesus by cutting off the ear (instead of the head) of the high priest's servant. He was ready for a fight right there and then to defend his friend, that is until Jesus healed the servant.

Then took they Jesus, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, You are also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. And Peter said,

Man, I know not what you say. And immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, you shall deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

Luke 22:54-62

Jesus didn't have to say, "I told you so!" That look from Jesus said everything. And I don't think Jesus was looking at him with anger or disappointment because Jesus knew why he was dying. He was dying to take away the sin of the world, he was dying to wash clean all those whom he loved, and that included Peter. No, I think it was the gentleness in that look which crushed Peter. He went out and wept bitterly.

I Was Bitter

When I left the established church system 40 years ago because I was offended at the awful things Christians said about me, I rented a flat but got into wrong, worldly relationships. About six months afterwards the Pastor of my old church, whom I hadn't seen since I'd left, came round to see me with his wife. He tried to have some godly conversation

with me but I was too bitter to talk about these things. When he suggested having a prayer with me and then his wife spoke in tongues to see what God had to say to us, I couldn't hide my frustration. We'd had so many visions and prophecies in the past but nobody lived by them when the going got tough. I'd become really sceptical and didn't want to play games any more. If it wasn't real, then I didn't want it.

The Pastor got up saying he was going to use the bathroom, but when he re-entered the room he had his hat and coat on. He looked like he was in some sort of trance ... and I knew that look. It was as though he was acting under the influence of God's spirit. He held out his hand to me and gave me a card.

"God's given me a message for you," he said.

I looked at the card but it was completely blank.

"There's nothing on it!"

"That's right," he said, "This flat's sanctified, you're forgiven, and he still wants to use you!"

Well, only I knew the significance of those words, but it was enough to make me realise this was really real and God had washed me clean ... again!

In Matthew 12 God says this of his servant Jesus whom he has chosen, God's beloved, in whom his soul is well pleased: he said he'd put his spirit upon him, and Jesus would show judgement to the Gentiles – I'm a Gentile! This scripture was talking

about me! God said Jesus would not strive, nor cry; neither would just any man hear his voice in the streets, it would only be his sheep who heard his voice.

A bruised reed he wouldn't break – I was a bruised reed and he wouldn't break me; and a smoking flax he would not quench – I was a smoking flax! The fire had died and all that was left was a bit of smoke coming from the ashes. But God in his gentleness brought true Believers around me. Jesus breathed on the smoking ashes, and the fire of gratitude and love for him began to burn again.

The verse goes on to say: And in his name shall the Gentiles trust – I'm really thankful that I'm a gentile who's been grafted onto the vine.

Human Nature

You know it's the easiest thing in the world to look at others and see their faults and mistakes. Human nature does nothing but judge and criticise. We say unwise and unnecessary things hurting people right, left, and centre. Like Job's comforters we think we're so righteous in pointing out things we consider to be errors. But if we had more of this character of Jesus, this gentleness, we would hold our tongues until we knew what God would have us say. Yes, I was being watched even when I'd walked away

in anger and bitterness. But, instead of condemning me for my obvious bad attitude and actions, Jesus looked into my heart, saw my hurts, bound up my wounds, and nursed me back to health.

May God help us. I want to be more like Jesus. Don't you?

Chapter 2

Keeping Your Word

In the sermon on the mount Jesus shows that people don't know the scriptures as well as they think they do, and in many cases they've actually got the wrong end of the stick so far as interpretation is concerned. Let's take this scripture as an example. Jesus said:

Again, you have heard that it has been said by them of old time, You shall not forswear yourself, but shall perform unto the Lord your oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of

the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you can't make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no: for whatsoever is more than these comes of evil.

Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus says the phrase, “you have heard”, six times stressing this is what man thinks God has said. Without the heart and spirit of the law, all we have is just a tradition, or an old saying.

It Gives You Backbone

Why would someone want to swear on oath anyway? Well, it could be they want to give themselves a rod for their back because they're weak. The problem with this is that if they're weak-willed they're just propping up a weakness instead of dealing with it. Another reason may be that they're trying to convince someone of their integrity and sincerity, giving the impression that they're honest and reliable. Actually, people who habitually back up their words with promises are in danger of giving exactly the opposite impression and arouse suspicion. Straight, honest words like “Yes” or “No” are far more likely to convince. There's also another reason which is they want to deliberately deceive others.

The very thing which is supposed to safeguard the truth can be used to deceive and propagate lies.

Many false cults and secret societies take oaths upon initiation. The Mormons and Masons are two examples. These oaths bind people, holding them by fear from ever betraying the secrets of the cult or society. The Occult is full of oaths and initiation rites, but this isn't God's way. It's strange that God asks us to make no promises when we become Believers. All he asks us to do is believe his promises to us. By making an oath we're coming out of Christian freedom and putting ourselves under the letter of the law, putting a false confidence in our ability to tell the absolute truth. Jesus doesn't want us to trap ourselves, because if we fail to keep our oaths we fall into condemnation.

Keep Your Word

I know nobody's perfect but I, personally, can get quite hurt when someone promises to do something for me, or with me, and they don't keep their word. When people fail to do what they say, I feel terribly let down. Some years ago my brother reminded me of how I used to be as a child. Sometimes my mother was so short of money she couldn't afford to give me pocket money and would say she'd give it to me the next week. Because I took her word as the gospel

truth I wouldn't let her forget. I'd add up all the weeks she'd missed and try my best to get her to pay her bill! But to be fair, it was my parents who taught me to be scrupulously honest. I found it terribly difficult to lie and would blush even when telling a half truth. I could never say sorry unless I genuinely, and in all honesty, felt that it really was my fault, and I'd never make a promise if there was the slightest hint I couldn't keep to it. That's why I could never promise to be good! I was very grateful of the fact I was born British because at one time our laws were based on Biblical principles which followed quite closely the ten commandments, and Christianity was the basis for our education in schools. The principles I grew up with like 'an Englishman's home is his castle', and 'an Englishman's word is his bond', sounded like real ideals to me, and am ashamed and appalled at the decline in our national standards since my childhood.

We Prove, Then We Trust

It's classed as utter foolishness nowadays in Britain to trust people without first having proof of their reliability. When Maurice and I travelled around the churches to minister we'd take a selection of books, videos and CDs to sell. Years ago people would offer to pay by cheque, and after filling in the

front of the cheque would often ask if we'd like to see their credit card so we could note their account number on the reverse side ensuring payment, but we refused just on principle. Sometimes people said they'd really love to purchase our material but had come financially unprepared. I always told these people to take whatever they wanted and send their cheque on to us later. Often they'd offer to give me a note of their name and address, but as we had no intention of running after their payment this seemed a pointless exercise. Besides, it proved to us, and them, whether or not they truly were Christians.

Integrity

Because Jesus tells us not to swear at all but just let our 'yes' be 'yes', and our 'no' be 'no', I think, in actual fact, he's just telling us to learn to have integrity. On many occasions in the past I've determined in my mind to do something and for a time done really well, but because I was afraid my will would weaken I've told someone, just to give me a 'rod for my back' in the hope that this would strengthen my resolve, but how rotten I've felt when my weak will has been exposed not only to myself, but also to the person I told, because I couldn't carry through what I'd originally purposed to do. I've seen it in others too.

I once knew a godly woman who told me God had told her to grow her hair long. She was elderly and had difficulty looking after her hair anyway, but she said that this is what God had specifically told her to do. After about eight months, when her hair became too difficult for her to manage, she had it cut short again, but it left me with real questions about whether or not she'd heard God in the first place. And if she had heard God, then how could she possibly rebel against something he'd told her to do?

Wobbly Faith

Another couple I knew for years had said that God had told them to trust him and not use contraception. But after their fourth child, and two 'accidental' ones, they decided to call it a day and make sure they had no more. It takes real faith to be convinced God knows what is best for us! In the past I've sometimes been impressed to fast for something and started to put my thoughts into action. But once I mention my intention to someone else it seems that my resolve is weakened and I lose all will power to carry out what I'd purposed in my heart to do. This doesn't only seem to happen when we're trying to do something godly either.

I hadn't seen one of my friends for quite a while and when I did I commented on how well

she looked after losing some of her weight. She was really pleased with the compliment and told me she was counting calories and, even though she still had a few more stones to lose, she'd done exceptionally well so far and felt confident she'd at last achieve her goal. The next time I spoke to her on the phone I asked how her dieting was going and she said that it had all 'gone to pot'. I'd been the first person she'd told about her calorie counting, but after she'd told me everything seemed to go wrong.

No Integrity

You know, we're not all made the same way. On the one hand there are people who have a problem keeping their word, so their promises are empty and worthless. These people can often make rash promises and bring terrible consequences upon themselves if their promise is taken seriously by the person they've made it to. Esau promised Jacob his birthright because at one particular point in his life he was famished and just needed food – and he needed it now! But, because Jacob stubbornly refused to let go of the promise which he knew he'd unfairly forced his brother to make, Esau lost everything that was important and valuable to him.

On the other hand, there are those wired the opposite way and would keep their promise no

matter how rash or foolish it may be. Jephthah promised God that he'd sacrifice the first thing that came from his house to greet him after his victory in battle and was grief stricken when his daughter, his only child, proved to be the one he had to sacrifice. It seems that keeping promises can get us into as many problems as not keeping them if they're made without much consideration and deliberation. But I can't help but think Jephthah did the right thing in keeping his promise to God, especially as he was actually mentioned in Hebrews 11:32 as being part of that great cloud of witnesses for his faith!

Keep Your Own Council

I honestly think that God is looking for people who can keep their own counsel and not tell their intentions to other people. For example, just look at Mary and think of how highly favoured she was. The angel Gabriel visited her with the news she was to become the mother of Jesus. She was given the greatest of all honours to bear the Son of God himself yet when Joseph, her fiancé, found she was pregnant she didn't tell him anything about the angel visitation. This was truly amazing as she was in danger of being stoned, or at the very least divorced. God had to reveal it personally to Joseph. The Bible records that Mary 'hid all these things in

her heart' and never mentioned any of the strange incidents that happened – hence we know so little about the childhood of Jesus.

Jesus also was very closed about his mission on earth. The Bible records that 'he wouldn't give himself to anyone because he knew what was in the heart of man'. It would be of far greater value to us, personally, if we could learn to have integrity and prove by our actions that we're trustworthy without making promises and oaths in an effort to impress people. If our word is not our bond and we can't live up to a simple yes or no, we just expose our lack of integrity and end up being viewed as good talkers with big ideas, who shouldn't be believed or taken seriously!

Well, something to think about.

Remember, we are being watched and will have to give an account for every idle word spoken one day.

Chapter 3

Overcoming Trauma

When preaching his sermon on the mount Jesus clearly told his disciples they couldn't abandon the law in the age of grace. On the contrary, they must fulfil it. Fulfilling the law demands more of us because it's the way of love. If, because you despise someone you slander them viciously then send hate-mail, but never lay a finger on them, you've not broken the letter of the law, but you've certainly broken the spirit of the law. If left to fester this attitude can eventually lead to murder.

Listen to this passage from the gospel of Matthew:

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has ought against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, whilst you are in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Verily I say unto you, you shall by no means come out from there, till you have paid the uttermost farthing.

Matthew 5:21-26

Jesus isn't talking about actions in this passage, he's talking about words. The law said if you committed murder you were in danger of the judgement, but Jesus said if you're angry with your brother or sister without a cause you're in danger of the judgement. At the root of any murder you

will find an angry spirit. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure, hostility, or antagonism towards something or someone usually accompanied with the urge to harm.

Many moral Christians have terrible anger inside, but because they've learned to repress and never show it, they've become moral hypocrites and are in danger of being judged as though they were murderers in their hearts.

Have You Offended Your Brother

Jesus gives some great advice. He said, "If you bring your gift to the altar ... first be reconciled to your brother, and then come." Have you offended your brother or sister, your minister or pastor? Does anyone have anything against you? Have you criticised someone unjustly, murdered their reputation, made fun of them, belittled them in the eyes of others? Have you borrowed something and not returned it, or received something and not thanked the giver? If so, don't bother trying to give God praise and worship until you've put it right, as God won't answer your prayers. Jesus says, "Agree with your adversary quickly." The longer you leave putting things right, the deeper you'll get yourself in trouble.

When I was fourteen years old I stood outside my parent's bedroom door armed with a carving

knife intending to murder my father in his sleep. I was fully capable of such an action. Anger had been growing inside me for years and had developed into an all-consuming hatred. I could only think of his destruction. When my sister, who was six years younger than myself, refused to back down from an argument, I was so incensed that I put my hands around her neck and began to squeeze. I managed to silence her, but it was only when I saw her face going red and her knees begin to buckle that I realised what I was doing. I let go of her in disbelieving horror and, as she fell to the floor gasping, I ran to my bedroom in panic.

I Had A Fit Of Anger

Not long after this my brother, who was four years my senior, was also on the receiving end of my fury. For what seemed like hours he'd been teasing and taunting me, so in a fit of anger I picked up the nearest thing to me and tried to hit him over the head. As he put his hand in the air to protect his face I saw the carving knife I was holding slash into his arm and, again, was shocked and horrified at what I'd done. My mother quickly applied a tourniquet to stem the flow of blood before he was rushed to hospital where he received stitches to repair the damage, but these incidents unnerved me. They

gave me a glimpse of what others saw in me. My growing resentment had made me so volatile that I'd react without thinking no matter what situation I was facing, and the person I was growing into made even me scared.

For a while, the memory of these incidents helped me to control my temper and, even though it was against my nature, I tried very hard to think before I reacted. Both my older sister and brother had rushed into marriage as soon as possible to escape the family environment. My mother, who'd vowed on countless occasions to divorce my father, repeatedly backed down as having three children to care for she felt financially vulnerable. So, at the age of fourteen, and the eldest of the three remaining kids, I felt it my responsibility to take the matter into my own hands to rid the family of my father who'd inflicted physical and mental pain upon us all for as long as I could remember.

I Had A Twisted Mind

As I premeditated what I'd do my twisted mind worked out my defence for the police. After my crime had been discovered I'd reason with them that they knew all about the violence, after all, we regularly called for them to stop fights in the house. I'd questioned a policeman once asking him why

he didn't arrest my dad and put him in prison. He replied that he was "unable to interfere in a domestic argument". I can remember my frustrated fear as I looked into his eyes saying, "Are you waiting for him to murder one of us before you'll take action?" He looked at me with resigned compassion and said, "In a word, yes. I'm really sorry". The police knew our situation and I felt confident that they'd fully understand my actions. Being fourteen, and too young to be sent to prison, I felt certain they'd take me away and place me in a home where I'd be looked after, and perhaps one day adopted by somebody who'd really care for me. This was my dream, and I'd deluded myself into thinking that what I was planning to do wasn't evil it was my duty.

The Noise Was Deafening

But, the reality of what I was about to do made my heart beat so fast, and so loud, I felt I'd wake everyone in the house and a dreadful fear came over me. I thought my Dad would hear my heart thudding before I reached him, wake up, grab the knife, and plunge it into me. The thought of this outcome made me back down and creep away to my bedroom in absolute humiliation at my cowardice. I hated myself for not being able to stand up to him.

I left home as soon as I could legally escape. To me, marriage wasn't an option, it was like leaping from the frying pan into the fire. I rented a bed-sit and, away from the violent environment of the family, began to relax.

From the age of nine and throughout all my traumatic years I'd continually gone to church and considered myself a Christian. Now, with this new-found freedom, I threw myself into church activities. My life totally revolved around the church. It was during this time, when my defences were down a little, that God managed to find a chink in my armour and he challenged me with what Christianity was all about.

Alone in my bed-sit I suffered terrible nightmares which caused me to wake up screaming, sobbing, and sweating, making me afraid to go to sleep at night. After sharing these nightmares with a very close Christian friend in the hope of receiving some comfort and consolation, my conception of Christianity was verbally attacked. He quoted this scripture.

If a man says he loves God and hates his brother,
he's a liar!

1 John 4:20

"And that goes for your father, mother, sister or brother. From the tone of your conversation I

know you're full hatred and bitterness towards your parents. Not only that, but Jesus said immediately after the Lord's Prayer that if you don't forgive men their trespasses neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses – so where will that leave you?" Then he preached at me telling me in no uncertain terms that the essence of Christianity is forgiveness and love, and that if I wanted to call myself a Christian I had to make a decision to alter my attitude and do things God's way.

I Couldn't Shake Those Words Off

Well, I was incensed by what I'd heard, but I've never forgotten those words, or the scriptures he quoted at me because they wouldn't leave me in peace. They gnawed away at my heart as the nightmares continued and I was forced to come to terms with the fact that I was the one with the problem, not my parents. I'd left home seeking escape but my problems had come with me and were robbing me of my peace.

My hatred had no effect on my parents now, it was only twisting and gnarling me up inside. In abject defeat I confessed to God that I had a problem and asked Him to rid me of this hatred. Even as I prayed I felt totally justified about my emotions, but I knew that Christianity and hatred were not

compatible. I asked God to heal me and change my heart towards my parents.

Well, the nightmares immediately stopped and at last peaceful sleep was restored. God then began to work on my attitude and caused me to remember things my parents had said which had happened to them in their younger years. We're all products of our environments, but I hadn't accounted for my parents having a past. Now God was reminding me of what they'd said and I realised that they too had passed through many painful experiences. Being out of the family environment my eyes were opened, I could look objectively at what had happened, and I realised that very often my father had been sorely pushed and provoked to violence by my mother's cutting words and rebellious spirit. She was such a strong woman, a fighter herself, and would never back down. She always seemed to need to be beaten into subjection.

It Takes Time To Change

As time went on, God did an incredible work in my heart and totally delivered me from my hatred replacing it, not only with understanding, but with love for my parents. Unfortunately, as my heart grew warmer towards them, their hearts grew colder towards me and they adamantly refused to have any

dealings with me. Any attempts at reconciliation always seemed to end up in painful arguments.

Since I was nine years old, my whole family had attended the same church and, like myself, had called themselves Christians. A few years after I'd left home, Dad had become a deacon in the church which meant he was called up each week to administer the communion. It was the church's practice for four deacons to stand on the platform, two on the right and two on the left to administer the bread and wine, and the congregation would go forward one row at a time to kneel at the communion rail to be served by them. Dad would always be on the opposite side to where I was so that he wouldn't have to serve me.

I Really Tried

One Sunday morning as communion was in progress, I walked round the back of the church and switched sides so he'd have to serve me. As he came towards me he said, "This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ", and held out the bread. I looked up into his face and said, "Dad, I'm sorry for all I've done to cause you any grief, will you forgive me?"

Pause. "This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again I said, "Dad, I'm sorry for all I've done to grieve you, will you forgive me?"

Pause again. "This is the .."

"Dad!" At this point he looked into my eyes, really embarrassed and confused, but I knelt there looking at him, pleading for him to acknowledge me. Eventually, with wet eyes, he said, "Yes, I forgive you", to which I replied, "And I forgive you", and I took the bread he was offering and ate it.

At the end of the meeting he rushed towards me, put his arms around me, and began remonstrating with me as to why I'd done this and why I'd done that, but I cut him short saying, "Dad, that's the past, let's forgive and forget and be friends instead of enemies". Aww, we embraced as father and daughter and I knew that our hearts had touched. But as we were embracing I opened my eyes to see my mother watching us from the back of the church and by the time the evening meeting came everything was back to normal and they both ignored me again.

I Tried Again

Some time later, I did the same with my mother. While the communion was in progress I went to the back of the church where my mother was sitting with her head bowed in prayer then, leaning over her shoulder, said that I was sorry for all the problems I'd caused her and asked for forgiveness. She started to argue with me during the silence of the communion

so a deacon told us to go out into the vestibule to talk there instead of in the church. I pleaded with her again saying that I was sorry for all the problems I'd caused her and asked if she'd forgive me. I'd caught her off guard so she didn't know how to respond but, feeling trapped by being in the church and not wanting to miss her turn at the communion rail, she quickly said yes. I grabbed hold of her arm and we walked down the aisle together, knelt side by side, and took the communion. But this also came to nothing when she resolutely told me that she 'did not want reconciliation'.

A Happy Ending

You know, rebuffs are very hard to take, yet I'm amazed that no matter how many rejections I had it didn't thwart me from trying to be at peace with my parents. It only proved that God had really done a miracle in my heart by thoroughly removing all the hatred and anger that I once felt. This story has a wonderfully happy ending because God eventually did change their hearts and I actually ended up as the one caring for them both before they died.

Jesus said make peace with your adversary whilst you're in the way with him ... whilst you still have time, otherwise you'll be facing the judge. You know, we'll all have to give an account for our personal

actions to God, not for the actions of others, and for this very reason alone I'm truly grateful that God was able to deliver me from the hatred and anger that I bore towards my parents.

For years unforgiven memories ruined my life even after I was removed from the situation – those who choose to hate pay a high emotional price to hold on to their grievances. But, if we allow God to transform us by renewing our minds, we can prove for ourselves that Christ's teaching is not mere theory, it's something to be experienced, and it'll bring the joy and peace which all our spirits crave.

Chapter 4

Hearing God's Voice

Hearing God's voice is such a strange topic to be talking about because so many churchgoers who profess to be Believers have asked me how I know for certain God has spoken to me. They've asked, "How do you hear God? Does he speak audibly? Does he speak through the bible? Do you get a feeling inside you?" And then they'll confess they've never heard God speak to them. I find this not only sad, but very revealing.

Many years ago I was in a church prayer meeting and just after we'd all been singing together that old hymn, "Speak my Lord, speak to me, speak and I'll be swift to answer thee" I began to have a vision. I

heard an earth shattering, thundering voice telling the people to, "Come outside!" It was so real and loud that I opened my eyes to see where it had come from and if anyone else had heard the voice, but nobody made a move. I closed my eyes and again heard the voice.

God Was Speaking

I knew it was God talking and the voice was so strong and powerful that I was afraid to disobey, so I got out of my seat (in the vision) and left the building. God showed me an incredible vision which I spoke out in the church, but the thing that amazed me was the actual voice I'd heard calling the people to, "Come outside!" It had been so real and loud I thought somebody was literally booming it out in the church, yet I was the only one who had heard it. It was just like the account Paul gave of his experience on the Damascus Road.

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus

of Nazareth, whom you persecute. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spoke to me."

Acts 22:6-9

On one occasion God told me, "It's time to go to hospital!" That also was like an audible voice I heard. It was as clear as crystal, and something I would never dream up as the only time I seek medical help is when I'm pregnant. But nobody else in the room heard it.

We've All Heard God

God speaks in many ways. If you call yourself a Christian then there must have been a day when God spoke to you giving you the opportunity to ask Jesus into your heart, so you've heard God speak at least once. Our task now, really, is to recognise his voice. If you were to have a phone conversation with me it wouldn't take many calls before I knew who was on the other end of the line. I'd be able to distinguish your voice from the thousands of other voices I've ever heard. And vice-versa. Don't you think that's amazing? Well that's just how it works with God. He certainly speaks to us, but very often we don't pick up on it because we've never asked

the simple question like you'd ask on the phone ...
"Who are you? To whom am I speaking? Is that
you, Lord?"

Thinking Differently

One of the very best ways to hear God speak to us is by reading the Bible. There's so much instruction, wisdom, and guidance in the Bible which shows us how to think differently from the world, and change our views and understanding, so that we become like Jesus in our lifestyles and we live lives that will please God. If we take notice of what we read in the Bible and start doing something about it then perhaps God would speak more personally to us, but often we just read it out of duty – you know, our chapter each day. We don't apply it to our life situation because we don't see the relevance, so end up closing the book and going about our business forgetting what we've read. My pastor used to say, "If you can't obey the revealed will of God for your life, what God has revealed in the Bible for every Believer to do, then God will never reveal his personal will for your life."

There was a king in the Old Testament called Josiah. He was only eight years old when he began his reign but it's recorded that he did that which

was right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the ways of David his father, turning not aside to the right hand or to the left. In the eighteenth year of his reign (so he'd be twenty-six) he financed and organised major work to be done on the house of the Lord to repair all the breaches, and Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I've found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and after he'd read it he took the book to king Josiah and read it to him. When the king heard the words of the book of the law he rent his clothes, and said:

Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

2 Kings 22:13

He'd read the scriptures for the first time and it shocked him because neither he, nor the people he ruled, had been putting God's laws into practice.

Well, maybe you're in that great place where you can recognise God's voice when he speaks to you, but now there's another danger. Did you know the

devil is not the opposite of God he's the counterfeit? That, of course, is something entirely different. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 11 that Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it's no great thing, in other words it shouldn't surprise us, if his ministers are also transformed as the ministers of righteousness. Can you tell the difference between God's voice and Satan's voice?

My Experience

Some years back a friend, whom I hadn't seen for a very long time, came to stay with us for a few days. She used to be a strong Christian but had long since moved on to other things and was now steeped in New Age philosophy, kinesiology, and reincarnation. She even ran her own clinic. There wasn't much we could really share together as our paths were so different but when she asked to see photos of my children when they were babies I brought out the little individual albums I'd made for all three of them and we both got quite animated. I'd incorporated in the books pictures of my babies in the womb during my scans, and photos of what I'd looked like for each pregnancy, and had even kept the clipped umbilical cords which had dropped off when their little belly buttons had completely formed. But what most

interested my friend was the actual dates on which they'd been born.

She got her pen and paper out and started adding up the numbers for each child individually, and then gave me a prediction or analysis of what their characters and achievements would be like in the future.

I can't tell you how shocked I was by what she told me! I didn't give her any indication of the horror and panic going on inside me as she talked me through each child, neither did I try to stop her in her tracks, but to my absolute astonishment what she told me was almost exactly what had been prophesied over them when we'd prayed and dedicating them to God as babies.

Discerning the Right Voice

Can you imagine how I felt? My mind was in a whirl. Could God be talking to me through this woman? She was certainly telling me things that were true, but was this truth? If it was, then why all the turmoil inside my spirit? Then God reminded me of Jesus when he was in the wilderness being tested by the devil.

I knew what was going on at that moment was spiritual and couldn't help what came out of my mouth. I turned to my friend and said, "What's

happened to you? How did you get so far away from God? Don't you realise that if we were still living in Old Testament days under the law of God you'd have been stoned for what you've just done? It's witchcraft!"

The spiritual vibes passing between us at that moment were so strong that she flew into a rage, I could hardly believe her reaction! She was so mad she immediately packed her stuff together and left the house.

The Devil Speaks The Word Of God

You see, in the wilderness the devil had used the word of God, Old Testament prophecies, when tempting Jesus. He was speaking what was true, and in the right context too, but it wasn't truth because **he** was saying it, not God. Even scripture is only truth if God speaks it, and in the wilderness Jesus had to discern between the voice of God and the voice of the devil. It's never about **what** is said, it's all about **who** is saying it.

A few years ago a man called unexpectedly at our house asking if he could buy one of Maurice's books. If I remember correctly I think he said he'd heard Maurice preach at a church he was attending and had been really blessed. Maurice was away at the time so I invited him in and made him a cuppa

as he'd travelled a distance. I got the book for him then sat down to have a little chat. He seemed very friendly and I was so pleased when he told me he was in the ministry and did a bit of preaching himself. But it was strange. As I listened to him I kept getting a weird feeling but couldn't quite pin point why I should feel that way ... that is until he told me he was gay. He said he used to feel ashamed and convicted about it, but God had assured him he was a forgiving God, full of love and tender mercy, and accepted him just as he was, so he didn't need to feel bad about it any more. I couldn't believe he would share this with me, a stranger who said he also was in the ministry. There are rules. Surely he'd read and knew his Bible, that is if he was telling the truth when he'd said he did some preaching himself! Surely he knew how God felt about these practices, that they are an abomination to him!

I Saw In His Eyes

The discomfort I'd felt got so strong within me that I nearly blew a gasket. There was a look in his eyes which to me seemed like he was laughing, and mocking. I knew in that moment I wasn't talking with the man, I was talking with what was in him. Real anger rose up inside me and after challenging him strongly I got him out of my house.

I must say here that I have no qualms with worldly people doing worldly things, but I do have a problem with those claiming to be disciples of Jesus practicing them as they're not compatible with the Bible. The apostles made it quite clear in their teachings.

Don't Be Deceived

If we don't learn the difference between the voices of God and Satan we're going to be deceived right, left, and centre in these last days. This is what Jesus said:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect"
Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24

When Jesus talked about false Christs he didn't mean that people would go around claiming to be, or calling themselves, Jesus Christ. The word Christ means 'one who is anointed', set apart and

consecrated to God's service. Jesus said there will be many false prophets and ministers in the last days who will be very persuasive with their teachings, do great signs and wonders, and display tremendous spiritual power. Pharaoh's magicians were able to make snakes, turn water to blood, and produce frogs – yes, they too could duplicate the miracles of God, but the operative word here is 'false'. If it's not God who's doing it, or saying it, then it's counterfeit and Jesus said many will be deceived. Why is that? Well, it's because the majority of Believers neither read and study the scriptures, nor have a sensitive heart to hear the Holy Spirit.

Know Your Bible

It's not enough to love God. It's not enough to pray, and go to church or Christian meetings. If you don't know your Bible you'll be deceived by the amazing signs and displays of power – like blowing people down, and the charismatic prophetic words coming out of these deceivers mouths. I say again, if it's not God who's doing it, or saying it, then it's the counterfeit, and if you accept it, you're being deceived.

Sometimes you can't check the message with the Bible because, like in the wilderness, the devil spoke words from the Bible to Jesus. His only chance of

survival in that trial was knowing the sound of God's voice, because sometimes the message is the same no matter who's saying it. You can't even check it with your minister because he could agree with either voice.

Everyone has a unique voice pattern. NASA can recognise you by your voice and they've been using this technology for a very long time. So does the FBI field offices, as well as other local, state, federal, and international law enforcement agencies. So how unique is God's voice, and how very necessary that you get to recognise it?

Jesus was being constantly watched whilst in the wilderness as all his reactions were being observed. Once he had reached the end of his fast and had passed all his tests angels came to minister unto him. We might feel very alone during our experiences but we are never alone.

We are always being watched.

Chapter 5

Presumption

One of the most dangerous characteristics to be found in humans is presumption. Doing what you want to do because you 'think' it's the right action to take.

In 1 Samuel 13 we read that King Saul had only reigned a short time over Israel when war broke out between the Philistines and Israel. The Israelites were greatly outnumbered and when they saw they were in a strait they hid in caves, thickets, rocks, high places, and pits because they were afraid. The prophet Samuel had arranged that Saul should wait for him in Gilgal, and after seven days they would rendezvous. But when the seven days were up and

Samuel had not yet arrived, and the Israelite soldiers were scattering, Saul felt he needed to do something to rally his troops and boost their confidence. He ordered that animals be brought to him, and he offered them as burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord.

No Excuses

Just as Saul had made an end of offering the burnt offerings Samuel appeared so Saul went out to greet him. Samuel was stunned. “What have you done?” He said. It didn't really matter what excuse Saul gave, he should have known his place – he was not a priest, he was a king. Samuel told him, “You've done foolishly, and not kept the commandments of the Lord!” Saul had gone beyond his call of duty because he felt pressurised by the situation.

In chapter 15 we read Samuel told Saul that he was to utterly destroy Amalek – man, woman, child, ox, sheep, camel and ass – because of the way they had treated the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Saul was zealous to prove that he could be a good king and acted immediately upon his instructions. First of all he warned the Kenites to get out from amongst the Amalekites, then went in with his armies to destroy them. He smote the Amalekites as commanded, but took Agar the

Amalekite king as a prisoner, and spared the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. He only destroyed what was vile and refuse. When Samuel arrived on the scene he was again stunned by Saul's refusal to obey God's instructions to the letter by allowing the very king – the head man – to live.

Oh yes, Saul always had excuses. When confronted with his misdemeanour he said he had spared the animals so that he could sacrifice to the Lord, but there was no explanation for the king! Saul was convinced that God would approve what he had done, and that he had obeyed God implicitly. But doing what he thought best was acting presumptuously.

God Repented

Saul's presumption caused God to repent that he'd ever made Saul king. He'd turned back from following God, so God removed him and made David king instead.

There was an incident in 1 Chronicles 13 where King David was trying to bring back to Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant which had been stolen. They carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio

drove the cart. This was such an exciting event causing David and all Israel to play before God with all their might, with singing, and with all kinds of instruments of music. However, when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, the oxen stumbled so Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he killed him on the spot, because he put his hand to the ark. David was afraid of God that day.

Presumption Is Very Dangerous

Wow! That was severe! But Uzza acted presumptuously. He wasn't a Levite, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, just like King Saul, and God had specified that only the priests were allowed to bear his holy ark. His presumption, even in innocence, cost him his life.

The dictionary definition of **presume** is: To assume or suggest to be true (without proof); to take for granted, to suppose; to conclude, with less than absolute supporting data; to believe.

Presumption is therefore not based on fact – it's supposition, and it's such a dangerous characteristic.

Some years ago God called Maurice and myself, together with a small group of people, to intercession. We felt the burden for our city of Manchester as the moral climate had been declining for decades.

It's been nick-named 'Gaychester' for many years because of the Mardi Gras, the gay city, and ungodly lifestyle in general, so we began to pray earnestly for Manchester. After a few weeks of desperate prayer God showed me a vision. It's like I was looking from a great distance away but I could see the vast city of Manchester nestling in a great valley, and crouching right over the top of it was an enormous devil, it was sitting there like a hen over her chicks. And God showed me this was the chief devil over the city.

I Remembered

God then reminded me of the incident in the Bible where the disciples couldn't cast one devil out of the epileptic boy when Jesus said that this type doesn't go out but by prayer and fasting. Then God said, "If the disciples couldn't cast this single devil out of the boy, what makes you think you can cast out the chief devil, who is over millions of devils, out of Manchester? You're presumptuous! There's disunity in the church you attend and you can't even get rid of the devils from there!" We could see how ridiculous our prayers were so thought it best to pray for our church. But then God pulled us up soon after we started by telling us we were again being presumptuous because there was disunity in our homes and we'd not yet cast the devil out

from there. We could see the truth of what God was saying but even trying to cast the devils out of our homes was unreasonable because God showed us that we hadn't even got rid of the devil's strongholds in our own lives. God told us to get ourselves right first, become the people God will listen to, and then let God guide us to intercede for what's on his heart.

Presumptuous Preachers

We take too much upon ourselves. We boast big things and think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. I heard many preachers making public prayers on the internet binding the devil and taking control of the Covid virus, but it was all presumptuous talk. Nothing changed!

So many people are hurting because of the false prophecies which have been given by well meaning Christians. They, personally may feel great to give words of encouragement to a wife who's husband or child is sick with cancer, telling them, "Thus saith the Lord, this sickness is not unto death!" They may feel really emotional and full of the spirit when they're saying it, but if the sick person dies then it proves the prophecy was not from God, in fact it was a lie. The prophet was presumptuous and has left behind a confused,

grieving wife or mother who now doesn't know what to believe.

My first baby was breech throughout the entire pregnancy. So many people prayed for me and I was given specific prophecies that the child would turn and be born naturally and I would have a pain free delivery. I held on in faith to these words and ignored the doctor's advice to book myself in for a Caesarean Delivery. I was in labour for about 11 hours but then found that my child was stuck in the birth canal as he was being born feet first, and I was whisked off for an emergency operation to save both our lives. God was merciful to me, but that prophet was presumptuous and fed me lies.

Dangerous Prophecies

If the words of prophecy are not coming from God, they must be coming from the devil – for he is the father of lies.

When Jesus took authority and commanded the sickness or devil to leave, everybody knew a miracle had taken place, because he only did what his father told him to do. He never acted presumptuously.

Some years ago we had foreign friends staying with us at our house. I did my best to make them feel welcome telling them to treat the house as their

home whilst they were with us. I thought they understood what I was saying, but I was speaking as an English person to Africans. I presumed wrongly of course, and was alarmed to find them using our land line phone to ring their family in Africa, and couldn't believe it when they'd eaten for their lunch a chicken I had left in the fridge for our evening meal. I had to say something to them. But when I did they looked amazed saying, "I thought you said we were to be at home! That's what we'd do if we were home!" I then had to explain that English people say things to be polite, but we don't actually mean them literally. I had presumed they would understand what I meant.

'I Do Listen'

I was in my early 20's and can remember a boyfriend giving me a birthday present. I could tell by the shape and weight, that the wrapping paper contained a book, and couldn't hide the disappointment from showing on my face. I wasn't a reader and thought, "Oh no, not a book!" Surely he knew me a little better than that? I'd really have preferred something girly, and romantic. But when I opened the package I felt so embarrassed for I found the book was actually an Amplified Bible, and this was something I'd been planning to buy

for ages. "You see," he said, "I do listen!"

We presume all the time. We pass on links and messages to people, but they somehow get the wrong end of the stick and presume we are meaning something entirely different.

Something goes missing and we presume a particular person has taken it and end up wrongfully accusing them. Somebody says something and we presume there is a hidden motive and they're trying to get at us in some way. I know of many marriages which have failed because a spouse 'presumed' their partner would not object to something. I can think of a number of reasons why we act out of presumption:

1. It could be we're proud and think we know best in the circumstance – like with King Saul.

2. It could be that we're lazy, and can't be bothered finding out what we should do in the circumstance.

3. Maybe we may feel threatened or insecure because we know that if we ask permission our request could possibly be met with disapproval, so we do it anyway thinking we can explain later, and if we made the wrong decision we can always apologise.

4. Many times we're just bad listeners and instead of checking what the other person meant we just go ahead and do what we think anyway.

Pride Is The Root

It's very easy to overstep the mark, all we need to do is think for someone else. We would do well to remember our station in life and not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. I fear pride is really at the root of presumption. You would think that these people who do their utmost to attract attention would be noticed by God but he doesn't see things as we do. The Bible says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

Yes, we're all being watched

Chapter 6

Over Familiarity

The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – in other words it's the very foundation, the building block on which our faith stands and rests. If we lose our fear of God then the whole building which we have erected will fall down because over-familiarity is very dangerous. Yes, God has saved us and accepted us into his family as adopted sons and daughters but if we forget who God is, and who we are, we will feel entitled – and I fear this is the sin of our modern society, we have lost the fear of God and it breeds contempt.

A good example to take note of is Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaid. It seems she was very happy

in her employment and enjoyed a good relationship with her mistress. Sarah had been barren throughout the whole of her marriage but now God had spoken to her husband Abraham telling him his seed would be as the stars in the sky for multitude, but he had no children and Sarah was now 75 years old! Because she had such a secure relationship with her handmaid she felt safe when asking Hagar to be a surrogate mother. But after Hagar had been intimate with Abraham, and found herself pregnant, her attitude towards Sarah changed.

Feeling Superior

Hagar was able to do something her mistress was incapable of and suddenly she felt superior. She was going to be the mother of Abraham's child and now only felt contempt for her mistress – she had become over familiar in this family circle. But even though she held this trump card, a few years later when God had miraculously opened Sarah's womb and she'd borne Abraham the son God had promised him, Hagar, together with the son she had borne for Abram, were thrown out and were no longer welcome in the family. They were cut off.

In the Bible women are very significant. They represent the good woman or the bad woman; the

church or the counterfeit religion; the Bride of Christ, or the Whore of Babylon.

It's so easy to start off right and end up wrong, as in the case of Hagar, and we've all done it. We only have to look at the way many of our children develop to see that this is just part of human nature.

Children Are Dependant On Us

Children depend entirely on their parents from the moment they are born. We teach them everything because they know nothing: how to walk, talk, eat, wash, dress, and we teach them our culture – what is acceptable or unacceptable in our society. Children look to their parents as the source of all knowledge. But then they go to school and an ungodly teacher takes over. And it doesn't matter what you have taught them about God, the education system will do its utmost to indoctrinate your child with worldly values, and convince them there is either no God, or there are many gods to choose from; and encourage them to experiment with sex, alternative worldly lifestyles, and to be free thinkers.

It's not long before your child is now trying to educate and correct you saying your thinking is wrong, you're old fashioned, and you've neither moved with the times nor accepted progressive ways of thinking.

They become contemptuous of your lack of education because they are over familiar, they know your arguments before you've even spoken them, and don't value your opinions any more.

When we first become children of God we are in awe of him and his great goodness, but if we're not careful we listen to carnal Christians who educate and indoctrinate us to start expecting and making demands of God. "If God has said it in his word then you have to claim it brother/sister. You have to lock yourself in a room and tell God you won't come out until he's answered you". Many even go so far as to sing and say, "I am a friend of God!"

God, Please Don't Speak To Us

In Psalms 103:7 it says that God made known **his ways** unto Moses, but he made known **his acts** unto the children of Israel. God tried to speak to the children of Israel on the mount when giving the ten commandments, but they were so terrified that they begged Moses to make God stop. They couldn't bear the sound of his voice. This is what it says in Exodus 20:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people

saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, You speak with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

Exodus 20:18-21

The children of Israel saw God's almighty acts in Egypt, they even crossed over the Red Sea on dry land and witnessed God drowning the entire Egyptian army, but they never became friends of God. They couldn't even stand the sound of his voice.

Moses was so different. The Israelites pulled away when God spoke, but he went nearer to where God was. He was in awe of this God, absolutely besotted. He never ran away from him but always drew closer. God is a consuming fire – the whole mountain was on fire and smoking like crazy, the noise of trumpets was deafening and there was great thundering and lightening ... but Moses went up into the middle of it all and stayed with God, without any thought of food or drink, for 40 days. He did this twice, and when he returned after the second time the skin on his face shone and he didn't even know it. He had to

wear a veil over his face whilst speaking to people as they were scared stiff of his appearance. But the veil always came off when he communicated with his precious, wonderful God because he loved him with his whole heart and delighted in his laws. He was in such a relationship with God that he knew his ways, he knew what pleased him, and he delighted in pleasing him. And the Bible records that the LORD spoke with Moses **face to face**, as a man speaks unto his friend.

Are You A Friend Of God?

You want to sing 'I am a friend of God'? Well if you want to find out whether you are God's friend here is a little pointer ... God defends his friends. Here's what happened when people just spoke ill advisedly to Moses:

And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he'd married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has he not spoken also by us?

Numbers 12:1-2

And they were right. They had both prophesied. God had spoken through Aaron to Pharaoh when

Moses had returned to Egypt to deliver the Israelites, and Miriam had led them all with singing when they'd crossed the Red Sea ...**and the lord heard what they said.**

(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) And the LORD spoke suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out you three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white

as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam,
and, behold, she was leprous.

Numbers 12:3-10

Did you notice that verse – (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) The words are even put inside brackets as though there's a very unique thing going on here. Moses never forgot who he was or where he'd come from, and because of this never became over familiar with God. He always knew his place. The one and only time he over stepped the mark God dealt with him harshly and rescinded his promise of him entering the promised land because he didn't follow God's instructions exactly. Even Moses could not trifle with God.

Never Forget

More important than not forgetting who we are or where we have come from, is to remember whom we are speaking to. We must never, ever forget who God is. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:28 to not fear them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear **Him** which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Remember, Jesus said many will say to him in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in

your name? And in your name have cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works?" But they'll get a terrible slap in the face when Jesus turns round to say, "I never knew you! Depart from me you who work iniquity!" God will not accept con-men into his kingdom.

You've all probably seen or heard of that film, 'Catch Me If You Can' where a young man makes millions of dollars posing as an air-pilot, a surgeon, a barrister, and yet he was never actually employed by any of the firms he worked in. He was just acting, and being paid for the con work he was doing.

Imposters

Many people pose as Believers, they preach, prophecy, and have even healed the sick and cast out devils, but they've not been put to work by Jesus Christ. They may have been put in position by the church elders or leaders but they are imposters because they have never come under the authority of Christ as disciples and learned how to love, to be humble, how to mourn, how to be meek, they do not hunger or thirst for righteousness, they have no mercy, they are not pure in heart, or peacemakers. If you find it too hard to love, and your heart is full of bitterness, or you have resentment and

unforgiveness towards anyone, then Jesus said your Heavenly Father will not forgive you. So if you stand before God and are not forgiven where does that leave you?

A Healthy Fear Of God

David loved and delighted in the law of God, and wrote about it constantly because it brought great peace and gave him the ability to forgive his enemies. Even though he was a king he never overstepped his boundary and always had great love, respect and a very healthy fear of his God. May we endeavour to make sure we are never over familiar with Almighty God, but learn to observe and love his commandments and laws at all times.

Take a good look at your life, search your heart. If you're not obeying God's instructions about how you should live then don't make outrageous claims which are not true, or think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. It will breed contempt and you will become contemptuous to others because people will read you like a book; you cannot hide hypocrisy.

God is not the only one watching!

Chapter 7

Take my Yoke Upon You and Learn of Me

We've just been going through the sermon on the mount again in our weekly Bible Studies and we were up to this verse:

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

We were looking at the word 'meek' and asking what does it actually mean to be meek? I was really challenged by the study so decided to dig a bit deeper on my own and found the dictionary uses these words to define what meekness is:

- Humble, not boastful, modest, submissive.

But here are some other really interesting ones:

- Meager – which means you see yourself as inferior;
- Self-effacing – which means you make yourself seem unnoticeable; and
- Dispirited – which means you're deprived of strength or vitality.

I honed in on that definition 'not boastful' because it made me think about the very first time I was pregnant and had a scan. I'd never heard of scans so had no idea what they entailed, otherwise I'd certainly have asked Maurice to go with me.

I lay on a gurney and at my feet there was a monitor. The sonographer squirted some cold gel on my belly and pressed onto the surface of my stomach with a probe. As she did this I saw pictures moving on the monitor at my feet. I saw a little shape moving and jumping around, doing somersaults, and heard a strange beating noise. The nurse told me what I was looking at was my baby in my womb, and the noise I was hearing was its heartbeat. I was mesmerised and couldn't take my eyes off that screen!

I Hadn't Felt A Thing!

The hospital is literally just around the corner from my house, but all the way home I was reliving that extraordinary experience. I'd seen such activity going on inside my womb yet, at only 14 weeks pregnant, hadn't felt a thing! If I hadn't seen it on that screen I could even doubt I was pregnant because my belly hadn't yet begun to swell! Yet there was life growing inside me which neither I, nor anybody else, could see!

I started looking round at the grass and the trees which had sprung up from the ground. There's so much vegetation on the surface of the earth, but that's what we see! What about all the stuff going on underground which we're never even aware of? Such as the seeds that fall into the ground and get buried, how those tiny shells crack open and shoots begin to grow seeking the sunlight. So much goes on underground before we ever see those tiny shoots which eventually become grass, flowers, weeds or trees. And I can still remember the midwife at the antenatal clinic who tried to prepare us first time mums for the big event. She'd cut a hole in the bottom of a shoe box and glued some foam around the hole. Then, as she held the box up so that we could all see the underneath, she took a doll and began to

push it, head first, through the hole, to give us all a visual of what was about to happen. But just as the head came through the hole she filled up with tears and could hardly get her words out. "Aww, forgive me for blubbering," she said. "I've seen it hundreds of times, but it never ceases to fill me with wonder. It's a real miracle!" And I thought to myself, even then, how very not boastful and modest God is.

How Great Is Our God?

He created the heavens and the earth which we can see clearly, even with our natural eyes, but he never brags about it or draws attention to it. It's only when we start looking, I mean really looking at these things in detail that we get a glimpse of how great, and miraculous, and marvellous God is. Jesus said:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30

Jesus said he was meek and lowly in heart. That means he had all of those qualities I mentioned before. He was humble, not boastful, modest, submissive, dispirited (deprived of his own strength or vitality). But, you might say, look at all those

miracles and healings he did! Well, that's true, that would certainly draw attention to himself, but he was very quick to make it clear to people that he only did what his Father showed him to do, and that he could do nothing of himself, it was his Father doing the works through him. So when Jesus said, take my yoke upon you and learn of me, he was saying he, himself, was under the yoke. He was being controlled by his Father.

God Is In Control Of Everything

When a field is ploughed we say the farmer has ploughed the field. We never say the tractor, or the oxen, or even the plough itself did it, even though all these other things were utilised to actually do the ploughing and the digging. We say the farmer ploughed the field because it was his idea, his initiative, he was the motivation behind the plan being put into action. So from this illustration we can see that God is the one holding the reigns, and we are the ones meant to be under the yoke with Jesus.

Now then, when I think of a yoke I imagine a yoke of oxen. Two oxen pulling the same plough together. But in actual fact you can use any bovine animal such as cows, buffalos, or bison. An ox is just a cow that's been trained to work as a draft animal,

and if you're referred to as bovine, it means you're sluggish, dull, or slow-witted. That in itself should make us realise how meek we need to be to even have the yoke placed upon us in the first place! Jesus said, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls."

It Takes Time To Train Us

I was researching how you'd train oxen to work under a yoke and found some great facts. Like with anything else, it takes time to train oxen well. Training starts when they're only a few weeks old, and the first thing they learn is to be comfortable around people. The first steps in an ox's training doesn't involve any work at all, but there's still a lot for the young calves to learn. They're taught to wear a halter and how to walk calmly on a lead rope.

If a man is unkind to his oxen, if he hits them, the oxen will be afraid of him and become vicious. But if a man looks after his oxen well, they become quieter. The man and the animals must become friends. They learn that humans bring yummy food, and soothing brushes, and petting. Soon they look forward to seeing their teamsters because of the good things they bring and do for them. One expert trainer had this to say:

Many years and many teams later, I can honestly say those first oxen I worked with were also my best-trained team. My success with that team was due primarily to the cattle being very friendly, hand fed since birth, and very young when I began training. I was their provider and their leader. I know enough about cattle to make sure that they never successfully tested my dominance. That first pair never knew running away was even possible. They trusted my judgement, even when I made mistakes, yet they never seemed to hold a grudge.

When I read this it made me realise the importance of just getting comfortable in God's presence. Once we've accepted the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sins and have asked to be forgiven, the barrier separating us from God is removed and we can learn about him. As we read the Bible and pray it's not long before we realise he's not an ogre, but a tender, loving Father, who has great plans for us. There's work to be done, yes, but that's in the future, we've to get a relationship with him first where we learn to become more relaxed and at peace with him and within ourselves. We learn the very basics, the halter has been placed upon us because now we're God's children, we're

no longer free to go where we used to go, or do what we used to do.

Little By Little

When they're a few months old, the calves are taught to wear their first yoke, which is the piece of wood that goes across their necks traditionally held on with bent pieces of wood called bows. The first yoke is very small, and a team may go through a dozen or more incrementally larger yokes until they're full grown. And when you do put a yoke on them you have to make sure that the same ox is put on the same side of the yoke. In other words, the left-hand ox must always be on the left, and the right-hand ox must always be on the right. To get young oxen used to the yoke, you can put the ox which is to be trained along with one that's already trained, but you have to make sure to always put the left-hand ox on the left, and the right-hand ox on the right. This instruction told me that if we're going to learn anything at all in our Christian walk it's vital we know our place and follow Jesus's lead as he's been well trained by his father, and has already walked this earth before.

Jesus said it's the straight and narrow path which leads to life, and the important thing to teach the oxen is how to walk in a straight line. You don't

hit them, but you need a lot of patience. It's better to drive the oxen from behind; then the teamster disturbs them less. God's ways are so different from ours. The very first, full sermon Jesus taught was the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 where he went through the law God gave via Moses, but showed how it had been abused and misinterpreted over time, and gave fresh revelation of how we should live our lives so that we pleased God. God doesn't want us to obey because he's forcing us, he wants us to go his way willingly.

Carrying Our Cross

When the animals are used to wearing the yoke and walking side by side, a chain or rope is tied to the middle of the yoke, and a lump of wood is tied to the other end. Hmm ... that sounds very much like carrying our cross. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Taking up this lifestyle of walking with Jesus, in a straight line, is surely the start of our useful, working life for the Lord.

Now, when they're used to walking while dragging something behind, the calves have to learn some simple voice commands. They're taught words that tell them to go forward, turn left, or right, stop, and back up.

Two Different Worlds

You know, that's exactly what happens with us! God is a spirit who lives in the heavens, whilst we're just carnal beings living on this earth. Really, we're from two very different worlds. Somehow we have to learn God's heavenly language or there's no communication. We too have to get used to hearing and understanding God's voice. Some Christians never get to grips with this even after many years on their journey, and very often when I've shared some of my testimonies and said God spoke to me telling me to do certain things, they'll say, "And how did he speak to you? Did you hear an audible voice or have an impression? Did you just read some scripture?" This is so sad. If you can't hear God's voice then you have to question whether you even belong to him, because Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice."

The teamster's voice should be the chief means of driving the oxen, and he has to teach them to do the same movements over and over again. The oxen learn to obey by this means. To get them to obey better he usually gives each animal a name, and gives them orders by calling their names. Well, would you believe it, when Jesus spoke about the good shepherd in the gospel of John, he went on to say:

The sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

John 10:3

So how relevant is that scripture: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart?'

A Gradual Process

At the beginning of training, oxen are only used for light work, such as cultivation and light transport. It's a gradual process to make them do more tiring work like pulling a plough, as this sort of heavy work should only be done when they're fully mature. Taking up the plough where God is concerned is heavy work and shouldn't be committed to lightly.

It's important to remember that with a neck yoke you can't make the animals walk backward because the yoke's not actually fastened to them. If the animals are not meek and submissive, or doing what they do willingly, they can easily resist and break free from being under the yoke.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:62

You know, this is a lifelong commitment. Even with trained animals it's advised that they should be harnessed fairly often, and should never be left too long without being harnessed. If you don't harness your oxen for six months they'll lose all their good habits, so even in the dry season, when there's no ploughing or cultivating to do, it's advisable to harness your oxen for transport or some other work. Then they won't lose their good habits.

Training For Reigning

Remember what discipleship is all about ... we're training for reigning. If you're going to be reigning then don't expect to be sitting in the palace on your little throne all day long. No, there's going to be work to do. You'll be busy! If you can't willingly walk in a straight line on your narrow path pulling your light burden now, as Jesus calls it, with him walking beside you in the same yoke, what chance will you have when the work you do for God really matters in the millennial reign of Christ? Let's get things in perspective and not only willingly, but enjoy being of use to God every day, now. Remember, we are being constantly monitored and God will never place upon us more than we can handle. Jesus promised his yoke is easy and his burden is light, and if we have that meek and submissive attitude we shall find rest unto our souls.

Chapter 8

Doctrines of Devils

I once read a provoking little daily snippet and thought I'd share it with you. The scripture was taken from 2 Peter:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18

Then the writer went on to say: "Grow in grace. We should be growing in every aspect of our Lord's grace. That means growing in faith, in love, and in humility as well. Try to lie very low, learning more about your own nothingness. As you grow downward

in humility seek also to grow upward growing closer to God."

The writer of this little encouragement had honed in on the 'grow in grace' part of the verse, but I was very much taken up by the phrase he'd used in his little commentary which was: "Try to lie very low, learning more about your own nothingness." This expression quite surprised me as I wouldn't have expected to see it in print these days, especially as the trend of teaching in modern churches is quite the opposite.

Self Love

We're now being exhorted to love ourselves. The commandment to love your neighbour as yourself is twisted by saying that if we don't know how to love ourselves, we'll never be able to love our neighbour – which, to be quite candid, is a load of rubbish because Paul said:

No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it.

Ephesians 5:29

We all know how to take care of 'number one' – ourselves. If I'm hungry I detect it immediately and, because I'm living in the west can easily go to the fridge, biscuit barrel, or fruit bowl to satisfy the

hunger. If I'm cold or feeling a little chilly I can get an extra sweater, a coat, or even an extra blanket to warm myself up. I know when I'm uncomfortable or sick because I'm attuned to my body so will do whatever I can to comfort myself.

Look In The Mirror

There are some very famous preachers who teach that we need to start valuing ourselves, saying we should look in the mirror every morning and tell ourselves how wonderful, and beautiful, and powerful, and wealthy we are. That we should speak positive things over ourselves, and dream our way to success. I honestly don't know how they justify this teaching from the Bible as it teaches the very opposite.

Paul said this obsession with self is the bane of Christians because it causes us to focus on ourselves instead of Christ, and results in us becoming selfish to such an extent that we can't even see the need of others. He warned us clearly that in the last days perilous times shall come, saying:

For men shall be **lovers of their own selves**,
covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers,
disobedient to parents, unthankful, and unholy."
2 Timothy 3:2

He was truly sad to have to tell the Philippian church that worldly Christians were very selfish, because "**all seek their own**", and warned the church in Corinth saying: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth". Indeed in that very famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul taught contrary to this modern doctrine by emphatically stating that if we really did have love (or charity as it says in the King James Version) then we wouldn't vaunt ourselves, meaning we wouldn't put ourselves out there on display to show off our talents or attributes for praise. Neither would we be boastful, proud, or puffed up, and we certainly wouldn't be seeking our own, which is a direct reference to 'selfishness' and 'self-gain'. Jesus said this:

All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:12

In other words, think of others rather than yourself. His commandment was that we love one another to prove that we are his disciples. He didn't only say: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," but he actually did lay down his life when he gave himself

as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. Only very recently I remember being asked to speak in a ladies meeting and give testimony as to how God called me to full time ministry and live by faith. Well, first of all I had to qualify what being 'in the ministry' really meant.

A Minister Is A Servant

The definition of minister is not a rank, status, or title; in actual fact a minister is a servant; a subordinate; an officer or assistant of inferior rank. A minister is meant to give service, aid, or care; attend to the wants or necessities of others; to minister to the needs of the hungry. When I was 25 my pastor started preaching the Sermon On The Mount in depth. It took him five years to thoroughly preach his way through just three chapters of the Bible so obviously it made a massive impression on me. I'd been serving in ministry from the age of 15 but when I was 26 God called me to give up my secular job and independence to live by faith. When my Pastor retired from the church he'd pioneered (he later became my father-in-law), we formed Barratt Ministries (which comprised myself, Maurice, and his father) and we went out on evangelism. But the Sermon On The Mount had been doing it's work and it wasn't long before

I realised if I wanted to serve God I had to give up myself: my ambitions, my desires, my hopes, and my dreams. God had to be my single priority. We quote so glibly that verse spoken by Paul:

I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: but the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God"

Galatians 2:20

...And we say it as a statement, a fact, that this is where we are with God right now. But actually, we're oblivious to what this really means. Did you know... I mean are you truly aware of the fact, that a dead man has no rights? It dawned on me that if I said, or professed that God was the Lord of my life, then it had to be true or else I should stop saying it. If I say I'm crucified with Christ it means I'm dead and it's literally impossible for me, as a dead person, to have any more say in the rest of my life. So that meant it wasn't my job to take care of my future, that was an area I had to leave up to God entirely. So, I gradually began to cut away all the props which gave me independence and control over my own life. Like, for instance, having no insurance, no doctors, no inoculations,

no birth control. Whatever I was trusting in, other than God alone, had to be abandoned. How can we prove we're different than the world if we live exactly like the world? The Bible says the devils believe and tremble so believing in God is of no consequence. It's what we do, and how we live our lives, that matters. It's so easy to think we're further on in our walk with God than we actually are, but God helped me and I shared with the ladies a vision God had given to me some years previously about a worm.

I'd seen a worm standing up on its tail clothed like a man wearing a hat, a coat, glasses, and he was standing with a group of men acting just as they did, conversing with them and feeling equal to them. He didn't know he was a worm; the men did, but nobody pointed it out. All the men were in small groups having fellowship together. As the worm shuffled to the different groups he heard them discussing people in the Bible and as they did he identified himself with the characters they were talking about. When one group spoke about Abraham saying that he was a friend of God, the worm thought, "Yes, I'm a friend of God!" When another group spoke about Moses and referred to the fact that

he was the meekest man on the earth, the worm looked inwardly and thought, "Yes, I'm just like Moses, I'm meek!" He even prayed with one of the groups and spoke to God on a man to man basis, and yet he was only a worm.

I saw God looking down from Heaven at the worm but instead of disgust and indignation, I saw pity on his face. He lowered a mirror and put it right in front of the worm. At first the worm had no idea that what he saw in the mirror was a reflection of himself, but after making a few gestures and seeing the worm in front of him do exactly the same, slowly it dawned upon him that he was looking at his own reflection. He'd never seen himself before so fell flat on his belly to the ground at the feet of everyone in the room in absolute shame and embarrassment. His hat fell off, his glasses went flying, his coat buttons burst open and the coat sank to the floor. All his disguise had been stripped from him revealing that he was just a worm, wriggling and squirming on the ground.

But as God looked at the worm in this real, unpretentious state, compassion seemed to fill his soul, and love flowed out of him for this

low creature. He joined the head of the worm to its tail making a circle of it, then he placed the worm upon his finger like a ring, and with that finger pointed he cast out devils. Then God said, "I can use worms!" '

Paul says this:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

It's God who's given to every man the measure of faith, meaning, the faith that is of any value is not our own or what we can muster up. If we really look at that scripture, I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, but the life I now live I live **by the faith of the son** of God, we'll see it uses the word '**of**', rather than '**in**'. There's a very good reason for that. If we're crucified then we're dead, and a dead man can neither have, nor exercise, faith. Now we have to live by the faith **of**, not **in**, Christ who lives in us. Every other translation of this verse that I've come across uses the word 'in' rather than 'of', but they can't be correct because a dead man can't have faith

in anything. Even Jesus said he could do nothing of himself when he was walking this earth. Whatever he did was by the faith of God because Jesus confessed openly that it was always God doing the works. So, the phrase used in that little commentary: "Try to lie very low, learning more about your own nothingness" is very apt. Trying to promote your self image is counterproductive and leads to awful self consciousness.

The Selfie Generation

It's a massive concern to people how many likes they get for their Social Media or YouTube posts. If they get lots of likes they feel a boost of self confidence, but if they don't they feel unnoticed and ignored, and in extreme cases even suicidal. Sadly, even though many of those attending commented favourably to me after the talk I gave at the ladies meeting, it didn't go down too well with the Pastor's wife who made a point of mentioning, during the following Sunday morning meeting, that we weren't worms, we were all valuable and God's masterpieces. I didn't point out the fact that the definition of a masterpiece is 'the greatest work in the whole career of an artist or group', meaning there could only be one of them, and if any were to be classed as a masterpiece I'm sure Jesus would qualify for that

title. The King James Version actually says that we're God's workmanship not his masterpiece; something God's working on, which is completely different. Well, there's lots of choice now, 450 English translations or versions of the Bible at the last count, so everyone can find a Bible to suit their own doctrines or heart. But my Bible instructs that we should stop focusing on ourselves and forever trying to impress people and that we should turn our eyes upon Jesus, as the chorus says, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Paul says in Hebrews that we should:

Look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Jesus said, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart": that means he was humble, not boastful, modest, submissive, dispirited (meaning deprived of his own strength or vitality).

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God (**because**

he had the fullness of God in his earthly body), he thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Timothy said the Spirit spoke expressly to him, and told him that in the last days some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; who speak lies in hypocrisy. We should learn to discern. Anything that bolsters up our self image is a seduction and doctrine of devils. It's feeding our flesh and making us feel good with lies. Let's shun all these doctrines of devils and fix our eyes on Jesus rather than ourselves. God was watching every move Jesus made and because Jesus made God his focus he's now seated at the right hand of God. God is also watching us so let's get our eyes on where we're going, rather than where we are.

Chapter 9

Can Righteous Anger Be Sinful?

You must have been in meetings where prophetic words have been given. People love to think they have a prophetic ministry, don't they? It seems so glamorous and appealing to be a mouthpiece for God, having people hanging on your every word. But have you ever heard anything like this? Here is one of the prophecies Jacob gave just prior to his death. You'd think that so close to death he would have spoken some wonderfully, encouraging words over his sons, but what do you make of these words?

Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.
Genesis 49:5-7

Jacob was speaking here to Simeon and Levi. These men are his second and third sons born of his first and unloved wife Leah. He begins by stating the obvious, saying, 'Simeon and Levi are brothers,' but what does Jacob mean by that? He's saying, Simeon and Levi are indeed brothers, alike in every way. They have the same nature and temperament, and because of this, they readily pair off. But they are too alike for comfort!

A Double Edged Sword

Apparently the medicinal properties of just one small glass of red wine in particular per day are amazing, but if you double that amount on a consistent basis it can cause liver problems, cancer, and damage other organs too. It's the same with salt. Salt is an invaluable seasoning when cooking. You

just need to sprinkle a small amount on your meal to enhance and bring life to the flavour. But put too much on your dinner and you won't be able to eat it. And so it is with Simeon and Levi. They are so alike that they act as one and this double concentration leaves a bitter taste.

Violent Brothers

When Jacob says, 'Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords', he's speaking here of the incident recorded in Genesis 34 concerning Dinah his daughter being raped by Shechem. As it happens Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, and while Jacob took a back seat, his sons feigned friendship with Shechem and the men of his city. An agreement was apparently reached whereby Shechem could marry Dinah provided he and his people were circumcised. Shechem was honourable in that he took Jacob's sons at their word and he and all the other men of the city were circumcised. They kept their side of the agreement, but Simeon and Levi took shameless advantage of their vulnerability whilst they were recovering from their circumcision and killed every single male among them with the sword.

This episode shines a huge spotlight on these brothers. They were of course rightly incensed with Shechem's treatment of their sister, but as

they talked together this righteous anger twisted into something cruel, vindictive, and monstrous. It wasn't long before their thoughts turned to murder and, making a pretence of solidarity, they pursued a brutal vendetta against the unsuspecting Shechemites. That's why Jacob said these words:

Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men and in their wilfulness they hamstringed oxen.

Genesis 49:6 (New English Translation)

This last phrase has been added to other translations of this scripture, but I think it truly captures their spirit. Simeon and Levi just didn't know when to stop. Not only did they destroy a whole community, but in their wilfulness they destroyed everything they couldn't carry away, they even vindictively cut the hamstrings and maimed the oxen. Jacob continues:

Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath for it is cruel!

Genesis 49:7

These brothers lead each other on. It could have started out as a strong sense of justice, but it quickly

morphed into something wicked and uncontrollable which wouldn't rest until it had laid to waste the object of its fury. But having said that, the bloodshed at Shechem was only one incident, Jacob must also have realised that Simeon's murderous envy was to blame for his beloved Joseph being sold into slavery all those years previously, seeing as when Joseph had been elevated to Prime Minister of Egypt he'd turned the tables and imprisoned Simeon after accusing all the brothers of being spies. Joseph obviously felt that Simeon needed teaching a lesson.

Jacob continues his prophecy by saying what would eventually happen to Simeon and Levi, and to their descendants?

I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

Genesis 49:7

In other words, Simeon and Levi were not safe to leave together. Jacob said they needed to be separated and diluted, otherwise they would team up and cause ruin and sorrow wherever they went.

So what actually did happen to Simeon?

Well, in Deuteronomy 33:1-29 Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death, and the omission of Simeon from the list was a reflection or fulfilment of Jacob's final pronouncement regarding

his sons Simeon and Levi and their descendants. Simeon went too far. One way or another, the tribe of Simeon disappeared from history and is now numbered among the ten lost tribes. And what about the tribe of Levi? Well, Levi became the priestly tribe, and the Levites were scattered throughout all the tribes of Israel.

Provoke To Love And Good Works

When God's people get together it's an opportunity for iron to sharpen iron. Believers are meant to stir one another up to love and to good works. But sometimes two Christians are so alike that the sharpening has a wholly destructive purpose. With a strong sense of justice they can, like Simeon and Levi, stir each other up to anger and worse. What's more, since they don't know when to stop, the impact upon a church can be devastating! In the rough and tumble of church life, little grievances can spiral out of control and what once seemed righteous anger can lose all sense of proportion. They end up joining forces and going to war.

So what does the Lord do with such people? God dilutes and disperses them, perhaps by placing one in this church, and one in another church.

Is it possible that you could be a Simeon? It's good to look at different characters in the Bible to

see if we can apply anything to our own lives, so let me ask a few questions:

Do you have an acute sense of right and wrong? Do you nurse a grievance? When wronged, do you repay with interest? Can an initial spark kindle a fire that rages out of control? Most importantly do you seek out a kindred spirit?

We need to be careful, anger over injustice is not as righteous as we think it is, and in the hands of Simeon and Levi, it escalates into something fierce and cruel. Do you know when to stop? Are you as ready to forgive as you've been forgiven? Are you patient, kind, slow to anger, and willing to yield? Do you bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things? Do you seek out a Levi to join forces with? God scatters his Simeons and Levis. Churches don't need a double dose.

Moses Was So Meek

Is it possible you could be a Levi? Well hey, the most famous of Levi's sons was Moses and, just like a Levite, in putting right an injustice he went too far and killed an Egyptian. But in God's school those Levite qualities of his were reshaped and redeemed. The Bible records that 'Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth.' In other words, Moses ended up exercising

his strength with gentleness. He used no more force than was necessary and knew when to stop. The old zeal remained but he had it under control. What's more, to hear Moses pray was to realise that he had lost none of that acute sense of justice, only now it was turned to petition for the Lord's people and the Lord's glory.

Support The Weak

We need our Levites, those who will petition the Lord and act with fervent zeal, who when the crisis comes, will stand up for the weak and vulnerable, just as Moses did for the daughters of the priest of Midian. Which of course is why every church should have at least one Levi.

At Sinai Israel entered into a covenant with the Lord but within days the covenant was broken. When Moses came down from the mountain, he was confronted with a people worshipping the golden calf. And so to save the day Moses shouted, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me." And who was it who rallied to Moses' call? It was the sons of Levi, who at the Lord's command moved through the camp executing the judgement of the Lord.

This fierce anger that destroys can, by God's grace, become the righteous anger that saves the day. Many churches have been pulled back from the

brink of spiritual adultery by the courageous stand of its Levites.

So what is it then that transforms Levites from a curse into a blessing? The answer is found in Moses' words, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me."

If you have this Levite character then ask yourself questions:

Do you seek to be a blessing to others? Do you want to know God's blessing in your own life? If so then stop fighting your personal wars, and deal with your anger, because it's not all about you.

No one experienced injustice more than Jesus but when being arrested by the Sanhedrin in the Garden of Gethsemene he told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52-54). He could easily have turned the tables and taken revenge, but it wasn't about him, he was fulfilling God's plans and purpose in his life. God was watching and knew he could trust his son. God's watching us too to see if we can handle the situations we are being placed in. Nothing we go through is random. There is purpose in everything.

Learn to submit yourself to godly leadership, rally to the Lord's side, and only do what you're instructed by God to do.

Chapter 10

A Man Convinced Against His Will

Have you ever wondered why things went wrong between Saul and David? You know, Saul had once loved David. After Saul's disobedience God removed his spirit from him and sent an evil spirit to trouble him. Because of the constant torment he suffered his servants tried to help by giving him a bit of advice, saying:

Let our lord now command your servants, which are before you, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon you, that

he shall play with his hand, and you shall be well. And Saul said unto his servants, "Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me."

Then answered one of the servants, and said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him."

So Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, "Send me David your son, which is with the sheep."

And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: **and he loved him greatly;** and he became his armour bearer.

1 Samuel 16:16-21

After allowing David to minister to him, Saul wanted David to remain close at the palace because when he took up that harp and played it, Saul was refreshed, and the evil spirit departed from him. Saul craved peace and David's godly spirit had that calming effect on him. But David was still a youth so when war broke out he was sent back home, as Saul would be out on the battlefield and David was too young to join him. However, God gave David a reason for being there at that scene of action and

it was during this particular battle that David killed Goliath because no other Israelite would stand up to him. David was a strapping young man and obviously must have looked capable otherwise Saul would never have allowed him to compete against Goliath. You need to realise that the whole future of the Israelite army depended on the man sent out to oppose Goliath. If he won, the Philistines would serve Israel, but if he was defeated then the Israelites would serve the Philistines. So make no mistake, this was a really big deal! Saul wasn't sending out some young, weedy kid!

David Was A Mighty Man

The Bible tells us that Saul was head and shoulders taller than any other Israelite, and had tried to get David to wear his armour to go out to face Goliath. The only reason David didn't wear it was because he wasn't used to wearing armour and had never proved it. So this in itself shows that David wasn't some skinny kid. He might be facing a giant, yes, but young David was actually a mighty man of valour. That's what Saul's servant had said when recommending him to Saul in the first place. He'd said:

Behold, I've seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite,
that is cunning in playing the harp, and a mighty

valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.

1 Samuel 16:18

So he wasn't the weedy kid you see pictured in children's Bibles. That's just a fabrication because people haven't read the account properly. God had actually prepared David beforehand for this battle. So now, right after defeating Goliath, and even though David was still under age, Saul made him captain of his army, and even the soldiers accepted him.

And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

Samuel 18:5

So what went wrong? Well, the problem started when Saul heard the women who'd come out into the streets to cheer the victorious soldiers coming home after defeating the enemy, because the very next verse says this:

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine,

that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands. "And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.

Samuel 18:6-9

Saul was envious of the admiration David was receiving. The Bible actually says Saul was afraid of David! He despised the fact that David was viewed as more valiant than he was, and he could see his reputation visibly growing. The rot had now set in, and from that very day Saul was bent on destroying David. Even as David played his harp to soothe him when tormented by the evil spirit, Saul would throw his javelin hoping to pin him to the wall. Jonathan, Saul's son, was ashamed of Saul's bad behaviour towards David and tried to reason with him.

And Jonathan spoke good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, "Let not the

king sin against his servant, against David; because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been towards you very good: for he did put his life in his hand, and slew Goliath the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: you saw it, and rejoiced: why then will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?" And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be slain." And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

1 Samuel 19:4-7

But sadly this change of attitude towards David didn't last, and David finally ended up fleeing for his life. You see the problem is ...'A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still'. Once that spirit of envy has entered somebody's heart, the heart turns to stone, and there's no softening it unless God does a miracle and delivers them. On several occasions David tried to be reconciled to Saul but had no success because the rot had set in. I can fully understand what was going on here because I've been through similar experiences. A few years ago I started attending a church after

being absent from it for a very long time. Since my pastor had retired the church had a number of successors and was now on their fourth pastor. The first time I met this new pastor and his wife was after I'd received a phone call from this very man informing me that a member of the church, who had constantly talked about Maurice and myself, had died and he invited us to attend the funeral. I'm presuming, rightly or wrongly, that he must have found our phone number from our website. But from the very first time his wife set her eyes on me I could see she didn't like me.

A Sad Funeral

The funeral itself was a very sad affair as only three family members, and two other church members apart from my husband and I, and the pastor and his wife, attended the actual cremation ceremony; and only one of the church members besides Maurice and myself went back with the pastor and his wife to the church for the funeral reception. Yes, just five of us at the church! Such a small group! Yet the wife didn't make any effort whatsoever to speak with us. Maurice had promised to give the pastor one of his books so I went to the church the following Sunday to give it to him. The pastor was quite friendly but the wife

kept her distance and wouldn't make eye contact. After about six weeks of being there I offered to play the piano for the services as they had no musicians and had said from the platform they'd been praying for them, but after another month or so the wife came to me saying they'd decided to leave things as they were and, "Oh, in case you didn't know, we have prayer meetings on Fridays!" The way she said it felt like she was throwing down the gauntlet! Almost like ...prove you're committed to the church first!

Happy New Year?

Well, I started going to the prayer meetings but the barriers weren't being broken down. New Year came and everyone was going round after the service hugging and greeting each other with "Happy New Year!" But sadly the Pastor's wife avoided me so I stepped out in front of her to greet her, but when I saw she'd responded so reluctantly asked if I'd offended her in any way. She took me to one side and after saying a few things looked right at me and said, "Why are you here, at this church?" I was really surprised, so said, "Wow, people normally ask why **don't** you go to church, not why **do you** go to church!" And then I said, "You've been praying for the prodigals to come back to the church ... well, I'm here! You've been

praying for musicians to come to the church ... I'm here! I'm the answer to your prayers. But your problem is you don't like whom God's sent!" She knew I was in the ministry and I could see in her eyes that she felt threatened. Indeed, she'd felt it from the very first time she met me. It was so sad.

A Deep Rooted Problem

Well, I tried on numerous occasions to bridge the gap and make friends, but there was no unity between us. Even the pastor, who admitted his wife had a real problem, couldn't alter the situation and eventually, and I honestly believe it was to keep the peace at home, he told me, point blank, they didn't want reconciliation. And these people professed to be Christians! 'A man (or woman) convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still'.

It was the same with my mother. I was a troubled young girl growing up and often ended up round at the Pastor's house after a family squabble. My pastor was well aware of my home life and was really kind to me, he even gave me jobs to do for the church to make me feel of some value. But my mother didn't appreciate him helping me, especially as it made her feel like a second-class Christian. I had terrible hatred for my parents growing up, but the more contact I had with my pastor, the more he was

teaching me how necessary it was, if I was going to call myself a Christian, to love and forgive. All his teaching, the sermons he preached, and even my own Bible study, paid off and God healed my heart towards them. But, as the Bible says, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'

It Didn't Last

My heart had changed, but my mother's hadn't, and no matter how much I tried to be reconciled with her she'd have none of it. On some occasions I did manage to get through her guard and talk her round, and even got her to hug me. But it didn't last because it was me who'd done all the initiating, it hadn't come from her. She actually told me she didn't want reconciliation. Like I said, 'A man persuaded against his will, is of the same opinion still'.

But, praise the Lord, this particular story had a happy ending. I prayed much that God would soften her heart towards me, and made loads of efforts with gifts and visits. But once I eventually stepped out of the way and left it with God my Mum walked back into my life with no fuss or big fanfare after seven years of me having no communication with her whatsoever! You know we really do underestimate God's capabilities. I've no idea what went on in the

secret places of Mum's heart, but God has a clear view of everything.

The Answer Came

I waited 39 years in total for God to work on my Mum, but he eventually delivered her so that she, from her own heart, wanted a relationship with me. Someone once said, "A little more prayer, a little more patience, a little more faith, and the answer is sure to come". That phrase 'A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still', is so true. And so is the other one, 'You can take a horse to go to water, but you can't make him drink!' But, with God, **all things are possible**.

All we have to do is make sure our hearts are clear of any anger, or root of bitterness, and then God can do his work, in his own time, unhindered.

Chapter 11

The Levite and the Concubine

Have you ever come across passages in the Bible where you think to yourself: Whoa, I can't believe that's even in the Bible, that's terrible! That just doesn't make any sense! That's too horrible to even try to understand!

I've just read again the account of the Levite who had a concubine. This story, which is heartbreaking, is recorded in Judges chapters 19 through to 21.

Apparently the marriage was not going well and, after playing the whore against her Levite husband, the concubine left him and went back home to her

father's house. She'd been there four months when the Levite came looking for her to speak kindly to her as his intention was to patch things up. The woman's father seemed really pleased to meet him so the men spent a few days getting to know one another. After the woman and her husband were reconciled they left her father's house to travel back to their home in mount Ephraim.

Gang Rape

Unfortunately, because the journey was long, they stayed overnight in Gibeah where a crowd of Israeli homosexuals, Benjaminites, surrounded the house pounding on the door, demanding sexual relations with the new man in town – the concubine's husband. The rebels wouldn't relent, so eventually the Levite pacified them by sending his concubine out to them. These fiends raped and abused her throughout the entire night, and at dawn let her go. The woman staggered back to where her husband was and fell down, completely exhausted, with her hands on the threshold of the house where her husband was sleeping until dawn, but the trauma she'd gone through actually killed her.

In the morning when the Levite got up to leave he found her lying outside the house, dead. He lifted her onto an ass, took her back to his house, and cut

her body into twelve pieces which he distributed to all the twelve tribes of Israel, demanding retribution for such a heinous crime.

He Couldn't Win

This is such a gruesome story, and it's had me baffled for years. Is the Bible teaching us a principle here, by showing with this illustration that men are more important than women, and that it was more honourable for the Levite to send his concubine out to the depraved crowd than that he, himself, should be sodomised? You've got to take into account the scripture which says:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

I personally think this particular passage of scripture was definitely given for reproof and correction. We have to read these stories from beginning to end to get the whole context, so we can understand what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable to God.

After making man perfect in the garden of Eden we get to chapter 6 of the very first book of the Bible and read this:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them.

Genesis 6:5-7

So he sent the great flood to destroy all mankind except Noah and his family, and started all over again.

God's done everything he possibly can to show us what the human heart is like, and even just after Moses had received the commandments of God on Mount Sinai, it says repeatedly in the book of Judges: 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.'

If you read to the very end of the story of the Levite and his concubine you'll see that God dealt very severely with **all** his people, because not only

were nearly the whole of the offending tribe of Benjamin wiped out – that's about 23,500 men, but 40,000 men who'd gone to war against them from the other tribes also lost their lives. Sin didn't only lie at the door of the Benjaminites, **all** Israel were far from God as they had no one ruling over them. They weren't accountable to anyone for their actions, and every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes, even though they had the law; and it was the very Levites who had been set aside by God to actually teach it throughout the whole of Israel!

God Exposes Sin

So, when reading these tragic stories in the Bible it's important to realise that God's included them, not to make us think that this is how we should behave ... No! It's to **expose** sin and point out the depravity of mankind when we won't be ruled by Almighty God. He's showing us that we desperately need Jesus Christ to be Lord of our lives.

God expressed his heart for humanity in the Garden of Eden. He ordained that man should have a family, work, and have a relationship with him. But since the very first human chose sin over God's good way, humanity has perversely chosen more and more sin, continually destroying what God approved of and set in motion.

God never intended there to be poverty, but knowing a sinful world would always include poverty he made laws in Deuteronomy that we should take care of those impoverished by saying: 'For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I **command** you, that you shall open your hand wide unto your brother, to your poor, and to your needy, in your land.' Even Jesus said to his disciples, 'the poor always you have with you; but me you have not always.'

God Protects The Vulnerable

In the same way God made laws to protect vulnerable women from oppression because he knew a sinful world would always abuse and oppress the weak, and break relationships between men and women.

Jesus said unto them (**he was talking to the scribes and Pharisees who were trying to trip him up about divorce**), Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.
Matthew 19:8

The fact that legal provisions were made in the Old Testament law for concubines by no means

proves that God approved of this marital model, because God clearly designed marriage to be a union between one man and one woman.

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Genesis 2:22-24

Then in Deuteronomy, in the law of God, men were told how to treat their wives:

When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he has taken.

Deuteronomy 24:5

We talk about having a honeymoon for a week or two depending on finances, but God said the husband should dedicate the whole first year of his marriage to establish this God ordained union,

and prioritise his wife's happiness. God actually expressed anger at a husband's unfaithfulness to his wife, and these Bible verses show that God's heart is for monogamous marriage:

And this have you done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regards not the offering any more, or receives it with good will at your hand. Yet you say, Why not? Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit **(No one who has even a small portion of God's Spirit in him does this)**. And why one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates putting away: for one covers violence with his garment, says the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously.

Malachi 2:13-16

Let your fountain be blessed **(let your precious seed be sacred and don't give it to other**

women); but rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and be you ravished always with her love.

Proverbs 5:18-19

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity: for that is your portion in this life, and in your labour which you take under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 9:9

Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus that when appointing or ordaining elders and bishops they should make sure that the men they chose were husbands of only one wife.

And even though Paul wasn't married himself, he instructed men to cherish their wives and treat them like they would their own flesh, to love them as Christ loved his church and sacrificed himself for it. So, if the Levite had loved his wife in this way, she probably wouldn't have gone out to seek comfort from others or left him in the first place.

We can criticise this Levite for his callousness and complete disregard for the wellbeing of his concubine, but that's because we very often fail to see that these stories are actually exposing what's in our

own hearts. Paul said he was alive without the law once: but when God revealed his commandments, he found out what a sinner he was, and it killed him, absolutely crushed him. You see, the law was spiritual, but Paul was absolutely carnal, and sold under sin. And we're all in that same boat because we're all flesh and blood, carnal, and downright sinful. Paul writes this:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing: I want to do what's right; but how to perform that which is good I don't know how. For the good that I want to do, I don't do: but the evil which I don't want to do, that I do. Now if I do that which I don't want to do, it's no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that, when I want to do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members (in my flesh, in my body) warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (in my flesh).

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So

then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 7:18-25

Many historical accounts in the Old Testament range from disturbing to horrifying, and lack a happy ending or moral theme beyond 'don't do what they did.' These stories can be heartbreaking for anyone to read. They were also heart-breaking for God to witness. He loves men and women, and has plans of flourishing and purity for us. How patient he is to endure his people continually rejecting the goodness of his ways in exchange for the filth of sin. And how gracious he was to stick with us, love us, provide for us, and give his own son Jesus Christ as a complete sacrifice for our sin so that we can forever be with him.

Relationship With God

So, when reading these stories in the Bible we should take note of how God deals with offenders, and thank him with all our hearts that he has brought us into relationship with him. He's gone further than just giving us commandments written on tablets of stone, he promised those of us who belong to him that he would write his laws on our hearts and minds.

So, there's no excuse for any one of us when presented with difficult situations not to know how we should handle them. We should do what love would do, we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and trust God for the wisdom to be able to say and do the right things that will bring right relationships with our marriage partners.

There were no victors in this account of the Levite and the concubine. It was a sad story and everyone, including the Israeli army who went out to war against the offending Benjamites suffered because of lawlessness. Nobody gets off 'scot-free', we all have to give an account for our actions when the books are opened on judgement day, because everything is recorded. While ever we have breath in our bodies we have an opportunity to get right with God. Paul wrote that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Chapter 12

How Great Is Our Love For God?

There's an incident recorded in Luke's Gospel of a Pharisee who desired Jesus to eat with him, so he went into the Pharisee's house.

And a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, she wiped them with her hair, and kissed his feet, then anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee which had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, Surely, if this man were a prophet, he'd have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him: for she's a sinner.

And Jesus answering his thoughts said to him, Simon, I've got something to say to you. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: one owed 500 pence, and the other 50. And when he realised they had no money, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, which of those debtors love him most? Simon said, I suppose he who was forgiven most. And Jesus said, You've rightly judged. And turning to the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet: but she's washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss: but since the time I came in she hasn't ceased to kiss my feet. You didn't anoint my head with oil: but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment. Because of this I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. And he said to the woman, Your sins are forgiven.

Luke 7:37-48

Pharisees were very strict concerning obeying the law of God, it's possible that Simon felt on a par with Jesus, seeing as he was a religious man himself. So when he invited Jesus for a meal he thought he was doing a great service by putting a plate of food before him as they chatted together. But then this woman, who was well known in the area for her loose lifestyle, gate crashed his house. Her behaviour obviously embarrassed Simon, and the fact that Jesus would even allow her to do what she did was proof to him he was a fraud, and not a prophet of God at all. He didn't look at himself and take note of what he'd neglected to do for his honoured guest.

Jesus Answered His Thoughts

His proud, arrogant heart only saw an ungodly woman seeking attention in a most flirtatious way in his house. How eerie for Simon when Jesus not only read his thoughts but answered them! What a shock! He hadn't uttered a word of what he was thinking, but Jesus exposed his hypocrisy and left him breathless.

This woman wasn't an upstanding citizen like Simon. Everyone knew she was a sinner. But she'd recognised that Jesus was a prophet of God and honoured him for his consideration to her in befriending publicans and sinners, and probably

casting out unclean spirits from her, by humbling herself at his feet, pouring out her heartfelt gratitude through her tears, and then the ointment which must have been considerably costly. She wanted to demonstrate her love and devotion. But there's no way that Simon could have identified with what she'd done because he obviously didn't feel as great a sinner as she did. Like Jesus said, her sins, which were many, were forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

Brain Alive – Body Dead

I remember a guy who was confined to a wheel chair after he'd suffered a motor-bike accident. His head was so smashed up it had to be wired together. He could understand everything that was going on around him, but because his brain couldn't send signals to the rest of his body, he couldn't coordinate or communicate as he had done previously. There was no hope of a cure, and this frustrating condition he had to live with was driving him mad. But from conversations going on around him he heard that Jesus Christ could heal. In his heart he prayed and asked Jesus to heal him, and Jesus didn't only hear, but answered, and that man couldn't thank Jesus enough for the miracle he'd received. He was giving out leaflets and witnessing about what Jesus had

done in his life to everyone he possibly could. He was so thankful.

My Own Mother Was Healed

My mother was the same. She'd been recorded on the hospital registers as an incurable case because of injuries she'd incurred whilst giving birth to me. I'd had the umbilical cord wrapped round my neck and when cutting me free, the midwives or doctors had accidentally cut my mother's womb. The cut didn't heal so she developed a septic pelvis, prolapse, and fibroids which caused her to be in constant agony. She was pregnant on a number of occasions during the next few years, but the tiny little unformed babies would fall away from her body after a couple of months, causing her even more pain. But somebody told my mother Jesus could heal her and she was prayed for. Immediately Jesus answered the prayer and Mum was instantly and completely healed. Wow, my mother was on fire for God after that experience. She wanted to shout about Jesus from the roof tops. If Jesus could heal her, he could do **anything** for **anyone!**

Paul the apostle had once been a Pharisee like Simon, an extremely strict one, and was considered perfect concerning the law of God. His credentials

must have been impeccable for in his letter to the Philippians Paul said this:

If any other man thinks that he has justification for trusting in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:4-6

He was so zealous for God, and his holy law, that he'd done his utmost to stamp out Christianity. He'd been outraged by this new teaching the disciples of Jesus were spreading which advocated there was no longer any need for circumcision of the flesh, or keeping to a strict diet of only eating clean meats, and wanted to stop the spread of these vile new doctrines which offered salvation by the grace of God and forgiveness of Jesus Christ alone. After his conversion to Christianity he'd been imprisoned for his faith, but when he appeared in court before King Agrippa he was able to speak in his defence. He told the king what he'd been like before he'd met Jesus, and what had caused his conversion.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Then as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? it's hard for you to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you persecute. But rise, and stand upon your feet: for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will show unto you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom

now I send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works proving their repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Acts 26:9-21

After that experience Paul had on the Damascus road his mind and heart were totally transformed. Without realising the sinfulness of his actions, he'd become a murderer of the worst kind – he'd been so deluded he'd actually been killing righteous men and women thinking he was doing God a service! But Jesus opened his eyes and he saw his awful sinfulness and was determined to show God not only his absolute repentance, but also how grateful he was for the forgiveness and mercy he'd received. He didn't care what happened to him now. He knew if he'd had to give an account to God for what he'd previously done he'd have ended up in the

lake of fire, so no sacrifice he made now could ever repay God for his goodness towards him. He threw himself wholeheartedly into obeying and serving his loving master, Jesus Christ. And when he was criticised concerning his dedication and love of God by people who were taking advantage of the gospel and exploiting the Believers, to prove his calling as an apostle he talked of the things he suffered as a result of his commitment.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I've been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knows that I lie not. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:22-33

Paul suffered greatly because he'd both met with the risen Jesus and had a personal relationship with God as his Heavenly father, and he gave his all because his true sinful state had been revealed to him. If God could save him, a man whom in his own estimation was the chief of sinners because he'd been a murderer of God's people, then this gracious and merciful God deserved his unconditional love in return.

Never Understood God's Mercy

I think the only reason we're not in the same league as Paul, have the same dedication, the same zeal, or have the same unconcern for our physical well-being here on earth, is because we've never really seen the extent of our depraved sinfulness, so have no notion

of the tremendous mercy God's bestowed upon us. In all honesty many of us don't think we're all that bad as far as the human race goes because we compare ourselves with other lukewarm Christians and get a totally distorted view of ourselves; and because of this we'll never love God or Jesus with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. Like Jesus said about the woman who gate crashed the dinner at Simon's house, her sins, which were many, were forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

God sees everything. We see very little. And the little we do see we justify because we always have a good reason for our words and actions.

May God in his mercy open our eyes and show us what wickedness in our deceitful hearts he's truly saved us from so that we can not only love him, but demonstrate and prove our love for him more.

Chapter 13

Unfinished Business

Have you ever wondered why your prayers seem flat and empty, as though God's not listening to you? Well this is what Isaiah said when prophesying to Israel:

Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Isaiah 59:2

It seems to be part of God's character that unless we deal with, and settle, unfinished business, we can't move on.

In 2 Samuel 21 it's recorded that Israel had been experiencing famine for three years, so David inquired of the Lord why this was happening. God told David that it was because Saul and his household, who were quick to shed innocent blood, had killed the Gibeonites.

Joshua Was Deceived

Joshua had made a league with the Gibeonites not to destroy them when the Israelites were marching through Canaan conquering the land. The Gibeonites had thrown themselves on the mercy of Israel and become servants to them. But Saul hadn't observed the covenant which had been made and God was punishing Israel for this lack of integrity.

Well David, who was now king after Saul had been killed in battle, was concerned for the suffering of his people so asked the Gibeonites what he could do to compensate them for what Saul had done. Their response was that they wanted seven of Saul's sons to be hanged and they would offer them to the Lord in Gibeah. And so it was that five step-sons of Michal (who were Saul's grandsons because Michal was Saul's daughter), and the two sons of Rizpah (Saul's widowed concubine) were condemned, executed, then hanged on the mountain in the

beginning of barley harvest. But then we read these really tragic verses expressing the pain of this widow who's not only been bereft of her husband, but was now agonising over the loss of her children.

And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

2 Samuel 21:10-11

Rizpah was powerless to stop this execution. Perhaps the worst part for her was that the bodies were left out on the open hillside to rot or be eaten by scavenging birds or animals. She began a terrible vigil. I can't imagine the anguish of this poor woman, this mother who'd lost everything – her husband, her status, and now her only sons. She actually kept vigil on that hillside for between four to six months, as it was from the beginning of the barley harvest until the rains came. Her display of grief became a scandal throughout the country, so much so that David was informed of what she'd done. And how did David react to this information?

And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: and he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.
2 Samuel 21:12-14

It seems David's conscience was pricked because he took down the bodies of these seven sons whom he'd hanged to compensate the Gibeonites, and after all those years which had elapsed since Saul's death, and the three years of famine, he finally retrieved the bones of Saul and his sons from Jabeshgilead. Then he buried their bones in the sepulchre which was occupied by Kish, Saul's father. And it appears that only after he'd done all this was God entreated for the land.

Now then, what troubled David's conscience to make him want to retrieve Saul and Jonathan's bodies after all those years? Well, I'm going to read

a few scriptures and hope that you can connect the dots.

Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard after Saul, and after his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul.

1 Chronicles 10:1-2

Saul actually had three sons with him on the battlefield, not only Jonathan.

And the Philistines put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

1 Samuel 31:10-13

And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabeshgilead, and said unto them, Blessed be

you of the LORD, that you have shown this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the LORD show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because you have done this thing. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.

2 Samuel 2:5-7

So, what really happened here?

Well, the Philistines had found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on the battlefield so they'd cut off their heads and stripped them of their armour. They presented the Armour as a gift to Ashteroth their god, and the severed heads were placed in Dagon's temple. Then they hung the headless bodies on the city wall like trophies to rot and stink.

Ritual Revenge

This was more than gruesome savagery. The Philistines believed that when you separated the head from the body it actually separated the soul from its home, which in effect made it impossible for the dead person to find rest throughout eternity. It was ritual revenge.

Saul's soldiers just couldn't allow this. They went secretly by night to take the bodies down from the wall, cremated them, and gave them an honourable burial under a tree in Jabesh, then fasted for seven days.

David commended them for doing this (just like he'd commended Joab over the battle when he heard that Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, was dead!) but God wasn't pleased with what David had done. David should have been the one to retrieve the bodies because he was the one who had openly said he loved Saul, calling him his father, and especially Jonathan because they'd made a covenant together to take care of one another. He did, however, take up this lamentation:

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, you were slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant have you been to me: your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

2 Samuel 1:23-27

But it's now obvious, to me at any rate, that David's conscience troubled him. He knew deep down in his heart of hearts that this was no way to treat the Lord's anointed. It's easy to preach perfection, and David had certainly done that. He'd said all the right things about not touching the Lord's anointed, but obviously God who sees what goes on in the secret places of our hearts had detected elements of revenge in David. He'd not personally touched the Lord's anointed, like he hadn't personally touched Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, but he'd been content for someone else to do the dirty work for him because it meant that his hands were clean.

Time To Repent

God had given David years to repent of his disdainful treatment of Saul, but eventually, realising David wasn't going to do anything about it, caused a famine which brought not only David, but the whole of Israel to their knees because there was unfinished business that needed to be dealt with.

Many years ago my mother spoke out a vision which she'd seen during the open time of worship in our church. She'd seen a lion roaring in pain. He was actually supposed to be guarding the temple but he'd left his post because he was in so much pain and that was all he could think about. It seemed that at some point he'd stepped on a sharp thorn which had gone right into his flesh but had never been removed. He'd become very angry and touchy because of the agonising pain he was in as the thorn was still there, but there was nothing he could do about it now because over time the flesh had closed up over the thorn and the wound could no longer be seen. But he'd left his post, he couldn't guard the temple any more because he wasn't able to stand.

Hurts Take Root

That's what happens to us when we let hurts, unforgiveness, or grudges go unchecked into our hearts. Someone says something, or does something, and it goes right into our spirit. It takes root and it festers. But that's because we're not wearing the armour of God and guarding our hearts. It's no wonder so many Christians fall away. We're meant to constantly wear that armour to protect ourselves from every spiritual attack, it's the only thing that

will enable us to **stand** and not buckle under the weight of the pressure.

You know my mother had that tremendous vision about the lion who was in pain, but not for one second did she think that was God trying to get through to her about her bitterness towards me. It took my mum 39 years to remember what had caused her pain, and it was God who had to eventually reveal it to her. But he was very patient with her because these things that cause us to become offended and bitter actually cause a rift between us and God. Praise the Lord, that unfinished business was dealt with before she left this earth.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

We can't be divinely protected if the hedge has been broken down by our disobedience or selfish actions. We have to 'turn from our wicked ways'.

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul says that we ought to examine ourselves before we share communion together, because if we don't, and we

have unforgiveness and bitterness in our hearts towards anyone, it's possible that we could be eating and drinking damnation to ourselves because we're not discerning the Lord's body. Christ's body is meant to be united and in harmony with itself otherwise it gets sick, and weak, and dies. That's why we're meant to eat unleavened bread when we break bread together because Jesus introduced this immediately after eating the Passover meal. During Passover the house had to be cleansed of all leaven as leaven represented hypocrisy. In another part of Corinthians Paul encouraged the Believers to keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Love Makes Us Vulnerable

We all fail in this area because we have a habit of justifying ourselves. Love makes us vulnerable to getting hurt, yet we're always either trying to protect ourselves from getting hurt, or taking revenge on those who have hurt us. Or, as in the case of David, we allow someone else to do the avenging for us so that our hands are clean and we can say we had nothing to do with it. But God knows the truth and one day we'll all have to stand before him.

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nought your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:10

We've probably all got unfinished business that needs dealing with so let's concentrate on listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit when he tries to bring things to our memory which we need to correct.

It doesn't have to end in failure. While ever we have breath in our bodies we still have chance to settle our unfinished business with God before we meet him.

Chapter 14

A Calling To The Ministry

In Luke chapter two it records that Jesus went with his parents to the feast of Passover which was being held in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old but without telling anyone didn't join the caravan as they returned home. Joseph and Mary had gone a whole days journey before they realised he wasn't amongst the travellers so went back to Jerusalem looking for him, and after a three days frantic search found him in the temple sitting and conversing with the teachers of the law of God. They were amazed and asked why he'd treated them so

badly, causing them such stress and worry. But Jesus just responded with that famous reply: "How is it that you sought me? Don't you know that I must be about my Father's business?"

In Favour With God And Man

He'd definitely heard the call of God as a child, but went back to Nazareth with his parents and was subject to them, and scripture says he grew in favour with God and man. Scripture also tells us that he learned obedience by the things which he suffered – meaning he had to learn all about self denial, and putting God's will before his own; and that he was tempted in every way, just like we are, but he learned by experience how to resist the devil and become totally obedient to his Heavenly Father. He was preparing himself, and it took another eighteen years before God considered him ready to walk in the destiny he had designed for him.

John the Baptist was thirty before he came on the scene. He was hidden in the wilderness undergoing his training, and when he finally did come out Jesus said there would be no greater prophet than John. He was ripe, mature, and very effective. So effective that he only lasted six months before his light was snuffed out and he was martyred. And if you think thirty is old, just consider Moses who was eighty

before he'd finished his training and God sent him back to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel from slavery and take them into the promised land. We jump far too quickly into taking on roles which carry with them tremendous responsibility.

This Is Africa

Some time back I posted a video clip on Facebook a friend in Africa had shared with me. It featured a little boy who was straddling an adult females bike, you know, the ones that have no crossbar. When I said a little boy I really meant it because he looked about six or seven years old! When he stood up his hands were actually up above his head reaching to the handlebars and his bottom was just high enough to sit on the 'V' in the frame where the chain and pedals were. Not only that but he had two similar aged little passengers sitting on the rear rack behind the seat! He started walking to get the pedals moving round and then stood on them, and actually rode that bike on the dirt track. I could hardly believe what I saw because it looked impossible! But there he was, this tiny little man, peddling away with two kids on the back who trusted him implicitly. The grown-ups watching, even filming him, were laughing indulgently enjoying the spectacle. I smiled at this incredulous sight too and thought, "What a

plucky little kid to be pulling off a stunt like that!" But on the other hand, as a Mum, I was concerned for the two small passengers who were oblivious of the potential danger they were in.

Proved And Tested?

As I was watching that clip it made me realise how often Believers who have just come out of the world after a massive life changing experience of God immediately want to go into full time ministry before they've been proved and tested, and how dangerous this is for the body of Christ. Paul said the ministry is not for novices, for beginners. It's for men skilled in the word who have been proved and tested in their lifestyles. I thought about Timothy, the young minister Paul ordained. Paul had obviously watched Timothy's life and found him worthy of such a position as the conditions for choosing and ordaining future ministers were very precise and clear because he was safeguarding the souls of those who would be following him.

This is what Paul said in 1 Timothy 3 about those who desire the office of a bishop – that is an overseer of a Christian church, the superintendent, the elder, or what we commonly call the 'Pastor'. The man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done right. Well, if this

is what he desires then Paul said he desires a good work. But then goes on to say what qualifications he needs to have.

1. A bishop then must be blameless

This means he mustn't be guilty of misconduct. We shouldn't be able to see obvious sin in his life. He should have dealt with his outward sins of the flesh.

2. They must be the husband of one wife

The culture in Bible days was that if a man could afford it he could have more than one wife, but nowhere in scripture does it hint at, or state that a woman could have more than one husband. Paul was stipulating that this role could only be fulfilled by men (not women), and married men (not bachelors). The Bible states very clearly the order of authority, which will never change no matter what culture or society you happen to live in, and it is this:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 11:3

So you have the order – God, Christ, Man, Woman. And that order is never interchangeable. We have to fit in with God's order whether we like it or not, whether it suits our independent 'Women's Lib' spirits or not.

3. A bishop must be vigilant

This means he must be alert, awake, and aware of what's going on. Strong's Concordance states this actually means being sober, or temperate. That a minister should abstain from wine, either entirely, or at least from its immoderate use. Sobriety and watchfulness are put together in Scripture, they assist each other. Those ordained had to be constantly, in season and out of season, at God's disposal, ever ready to teach the statutes of the Lord. Paul even encouraged Timothy to 'drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities', meaning Paul wouldn't have needed to say that if Timothy was already drinking it. And if Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray because they didn't know when he would be coming back then he expected them to be vigilant and alert at all times.

How can you be alert or vigilant if your mind's clouded with strong drink? I think we very often forget that to follow Jesus we have to exercise self-denial, which just means denying things which are

legitimate but nothing more than satisfying to the flesh rather than the spirit.

4. He must be sober

Now then, you'd think sober here was referring to not being drunk with wine, but in actual fact it means that he should have a sound mind, be sane, able to think and assess situations sensibly, having control over his emotions and be able to curb his desires and impulses. He mustn't be silly or indulge in foolish talking or jesting which isn't convenient. The Bible uses the word sober, or grave, but it definitely doesn't mean he should be miserable or long-faced.

5. He needs to be of good behaviour

Well, in the context here this simply means 'modest', but I can't help thinking of all the showmanship I see on platforms today. Preachers walking up and down like entertainers, and the so called 'worship team' on display just like pop groups. It's a far cry from how Jesus behaved. Jesus would often sit in a boat, or go up a mountain and sit down to teach, and would walk freely amongst the crowds in the open streets, accessible to everyone. And he certainly didn't take musicians around with him to attract a crowd. No, he got people's attention by

healing someone and then he soon had a crowd to preach to. Paul said those in the ministry were to behave themselves modestly and to follow the example of Jesus.

6. They should be given to hospitality

We often forget that the word minister actually means servant. It's one thing to be seen in public on the platform, but it's quite another thing to invite people into your home to let them experience how you behave in private. Paul said ministers should be hospitable, and generous to guests. You have to be willing to give yourself generously.

7. Those in ministry need to be apt to teach

Well, it's obvious what this means. If you're going to be leading people you need to be able to teach, and do it skilfully, having a good knowledge and understanding of the word of God to enable those you're teaching to grow to maturity in God.

8. Another condition is that they are not given to wine

Having a glass of wine is quite different to partying, carousing, or being drunk. The Bible

warns about the dangers of excessive drinking, and this is not something fitting for a Believer, let alone those seeking this ministry.

9. Not a striker

Here Paul's talking about someone who can't control his emotions, a man who's a contentious, quarrelsome person, someone who's ready to settle an argument with a fight. Or a man who beats his wife and children. This type of behaviour is not fitting for someone in the ministry. You can't possibly set a godly example if you can't help having a punch up.

10. Not greedy of filthy lucre

Wow, this one's a 'biggie'. I was in a church meeting in Malawi a few years ago and the offering bag went round the large congregation seven times for various reasons! I'd never seen anything like it! Filth and squalor, hunger, and people in rags outside the church doors, but in this lavish building where the pastor was strutting up and down as though he was some superstar kept giving appeals for this, that and the other. I just want to say, being in the ministry is not a 'good career'! If that's what you're looking for you need to go to university and pay

your dues. Skilful workers get good money. But Paul told those who wanted to be in the ministry not to seek riches and to keep away from those teachers who have corrupt minds.

... Supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things;

1 Timothy 6:5-11

What a far cry from what's being taught in the mainstream churches today. But that's why we need to know our Bibles.

11. He needs to be patient

It's not easy being in the ministry, like it's not easy being a parent. People will be coming from

all walks of life with many problems. They won't change overnight – just like you didn't. You'll need patience if you're going to be of any use to them, so that you can help them and guide them through their struggles.

12. One that rules well his own house

Paul adds further – having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?).

This is why a minister needs to be a married man. You need to have had the experience of bringing up your own family, able to keep good relationships in your home. If you have a bad marriage and you and your wife can't get along peaceably in the home, and all your children hate or despise you, how on earth can you expect to run a church any differently? It doesn't make any sense. It will never work.

13. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil

Not a novice! This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and means that which is 'newly planted', a plant that's not strong, nor fitted to bear

the severity of storms. So Paul's talking about a new convert who's had little opportunity to even test his own faith, or to give evidence to others that he would be faithful and fit for the task. And because he's so young in his faith and been elevated so quickly to the highest office in the church, the commendations and flattery he might receive will go to his head. It takes time for God to transform a man. He needs to go through many tests and trials before he has been broken and thinks like Christ.

14. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without

You know, Christians often make excuses for their inconsistent lifestyles by saying, "Well, I'm saved, but I'm not perfect yet!" But I've found that non-Christians know very well how Christians ought to behave. You can preach or testify about Jesus and God, but if your lifestyle doesn't match up then you don't only bring reproach upon yourself, you shame God and his name is also brought into disrepute and blasphemed.

God knows long before you do about any gifts or calling he's placed on your life and it takes years to prepare us to fulfil our role. You'd imagine that when God speaks specifically to you and puts in your heart something that he's planned for you to

do that it'll happen immediately, but that's not how God works. He shares his plan by giving you a very broad picture of what he's about to do so that you can prepare yourself mentally, but then the training starts.

The Army Life

It's just like when you sign up for the army. You get a very broad picture of what you're signing up for, which is to be of service to your country, and go to war if necessary, but then you get down to the finer details and the training starts – which isn't always pleasant. The desire to become a brain surgeon or a vet isn't enough, you have to endure those gruelling years of training first. And if you don't pass your exams you can wave goodbye to all your hopes and dreams.

There's plenty of room for new converts who are full of enthusiasm and fire to go out encouraging and helping ministries, but preparing the church to be ready for the return of Jesus is the most serious of all vocations. That's because it's not just for this life – it's for eternity. Your life should speak louder than your words.

If you desire to be full time for God in the ministry that's a good thing, but make sure you do it God's way. He's watching every move you make

and only those who pass the test will qualify to fulfil his will and purpose.

Chapter 15

Standing for Your Convictions

Some years ago when I read through the entire book of Esther in one sitting I got a whole new picture, and realised that even though Esther played a very important role, Mordecai was actually the man this book was about as he brought glory and honour to God.

God is the Master Strategist, and does what he likes – what pleases him.

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for you have created all

things, and for your pleasure they are and were created.

Revelation 4:11

I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Isaiah 45:6-7

When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? And when he hides his face, who then can behold him? Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.

Job 34:29

Make no mistake, God rules in the affairs of men, and moves people and circumstances around according to his purpose. This book of Esther is really interesting because in chapter 1 we read how a queen is dethroned and in the very next chapter we read of another queen, Esther, being crowned. Mordecai and Hadassah (that was Esther's real Jewish name) were already living in Shushan the palace area. They were already positioned where God wanted them to be as God had been preparing the scene for years, but the fact that Esther had become queen brought no glory to God because her true identity was kept hidden, and for the next five years

she settled down to living the dream, being waited on hand and foot in the palace, under her assumed Babylonian name, Esther. But in this second chapter we learn an amazing thing, and find that even though she was now Queen of Babylon she still obeyed Mordecai, just like she did when he brought her up. Esther never revealed she was a Jewess because Mordecai had given her strict instructions and charged her. She never forgot where she came from.

A Plot Uncovered

At the end of this second chapter, very early on in the book, Mordecai is introduced into the story. He overhears two of the king's chamberlains plotting to kill the king so reports it to Esther who in turn informs the king. After being tried and found guilty, the conspirators are hanged. The whole event was recorded in the chronicles of the kings. This might seem like a random incident but it was all part of God's plan, he was setting the scene.

The next eight chapters tell the story of an incredible battle going on between Haman, an Amalekite who'd been promoted to become the prime minister of Babylon, and Mordecai, a Jew who was one of the captives Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away from Jerusalem to

Babylon. And it was Mordecai who was the aggressor and picked the fight. Why? Because he'd read the law of Moses and was standing by his convictions. This is what Moses wrote:

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you were come forth out of Egypt; how he met you by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, even all that were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shalt not forget it.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

Mordecai didn't have anything personal against Haman, he just wouldn't bow down, or submit himself, to an Amalekite. As far as God was concerned Amalekites were the enemy. But it wasn't long before his disrespect was brought to Haman's attention and once Haman had found out Mordecai was a Jew it wasn't enough for him to eliminate only one Jew, he wanted to destroy them all. Why was that? Well, it's most likely because Haman also

remembered the fierce wars between Israel and Amalek when Joshua was conquering Canaan after being in the wilderness for 40 years, and also in Saul's time when God had told him to destroy every man, woman, child, and even animal belonging to Amalek. Haman had been publicly insulted and was in this privileged position to pay Israel back. He, too, could have been standing by his convictions and was now on a mission to annihilate every single Jew from off the face of the earth.

And Haman said to king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it's not for the king's profit to suffer them **(or allow them to live)**. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said to Haman, The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

Esther 3:8

Haman wrote letters sealed with the king's signet ring, and he sent them by posts in haste to all of the king's 127 provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women (just like God had instructed Joshua and Saul) in one day, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. The posts went out and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. So now the king and Haman celebrated whilst the Jews in Shushan suffered untold misery and shock at this devastating news. Mordecai donned sackcloth and ashes and cried at the king's gate; and in every province Jews fasted and wailed.

No Respect For Haman

But at this point I want to really look at Mordecai. How on earth did he feel when he saw what his actions had provoked in Haman? If only he'd shown a bit of respect for this man who'd been placed in government. What difference did it really make that he was an Amalekite? God himself had put his own people in Babylon and told them to serve those who ruled over them so why did he kick up such a fuss and publicly refuse to bow, especially when all the other Jews willingly obeyed the government? His mind must have been in torment. Maybe he was wrong in his thinking because now he'd not only put himself

in danger, he'd jeopardised the whole Jewish nation. This decree that had been given meant that anyone who had a grudge, or was prejudiced against the Jews, had a licence to murder and plunder at will men, women, and children. In just a few months time they were all going to be wiped out because of Mordecai's stubbornness and arrogance. It's no wonder he donned sackcloth and ashes and went into the midst of the city crying with a loud and bitter cry, even in the king's gate, as he humbled himself before Almighty God seeking forgiveness and deliverance. And in every province where the king's decree came there was great mourning among the Jews: fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. This was all his fault!

Wise or Foolish?

If you didn't know the end of this story what would you think of Mordecai? Would you back him up and agree with his actions? Or would you say he'd been a fool and acted in the flesh, or even worse, that he'd listened to the devil? He'd certainly counted the cost where he was concerned knowing he might have to pay with his life for his actions, but he'd never envisaged in his wildest imagination it would have implicated all the Jews.

Esther believed in Mordecai and told him to call all the Jews to a three days total abstinence fast including herself and her maidens. But would they take kindly to Mordecai's instruction? Surely his actions had made him many enemies amongst the Jews.

Your Own Convictions

Well, everyone was given the opportunity to stand by their own convictions. All their lives were at risk now. If they believed in Mordecai and what he was standing for then they'd have joined him.

Immediately after this three days fast God reminded the king that Mordecai hadn't been rewarded for saving his life from the conspirators, who without realising it shamed Haman publicly by having him parade Mordecai, dressed in the king's own clothes, riding on the king's own horse wearing a royal crown upon his head through the streets of Shushan proclaiming, "This is how the king treats those he wants to honour!" And the tables turned! Mordecai was honoured and rewarded by God for standing by his convictions and taking the pressure.

Moses was faced with a similar situation when God told him to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Israelite slaves go. Pharaoh was so miffed at Moses's audacity that he told the Egyptian taskmasters

to increase the already gruelling workload of the Israelites, who in turn whipped any Israelite who couldn't keep up. Obviously the Israelites weren't very happy with Moses and angry that he'd opened his big mouth because it had made life worse for all of them. And what about when God started sending the plagues on Egypt? The Bible doesn't record that the Israelites were exempt from the effects of the first few catastrophes, like the water being turned to blood, the frogs, or the lice.

God Separated Israel

It was only when God sent the flies that he began to make a separation between Egypt and Goshen so the Israelites didn't suffer with the Egyptians. Many of the Israelites must have regarded Moses as a menace rather than a deliverer. And how did Moses feel seeing the Israelites suffer because he was standing by his convictions? The thing is, God wasn't only proving Moses to see if he'd obey his commandments, he was also proving those who were following him to see if they really did believe that Moses was God's choice or not, and the final plague in Egypt was the decider. If any of the Israelites ignored Moses's instructions about applying blood to the door posts and lintels of their homes then they too would suffer the consequences

and be destroyed along with the Egyptians. Every single householder had to make a choice to stand by his convictions, there was no other way out of that test.

All scripture is written for our benefit and shows us how God deals with his own. If we're going to be disciples of Jesus Christ we're all going to be placed in a similar situation to that of Mordecai and Moses. Everyone will have to stand up for what they believe in their heart of hearts at some point in their lives.

Because God was calling me to live a different lifestyle as a young woman I lost any hopes for a relationship with my blood family because it aroused envy and competition – and that was in a Christian household! You'd think there would be no problem, but Jesus said he didn't come to bring peace. He's testing us to see if we're worthy to be with him in his kingdom.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of

me. And he that takes not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me. He that finds his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it

Matthew 10:34-39

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ brings repercussions from your family, your church, even your nearest and dearest, because they won't understand you if they're not walking on the same strait and narrow path you're on. Jesus himself will end up as a barrier between you. He warned us to expect opposition and that's why he advised those who wanted to follow him to sit down, count the cost, and assess whether they're in it for the long haul as, in Jesus's own words, if you put your hand to the plough and then look back you're not fit for the kingdom.

A Heavenly Vision

Paul knew what he was in for when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. He knew he'd have to suffer many things and said at the end of his life he'd not been disobedient to the Heavenly vision. Jesus knew what rejection and opposition he'd have to face but set his face like a flint knowing he'd get the prize at the end; and many who believe in Jesus and all he stands for will suffer, and some will even lose

their lives and die martyrs deaths because of what he prophesied.

So don't make a hasty decision. Discipleship is not for the fainthearted. There will be many challenges and extreme pressure. As Paul said in Romans 12:3: 'God has given to every man a measure of faith', so think soberly and make a well thought out decision about whether you're going to walk the rest of your life as a stranger and pilgrim no matter what country you're living in, because all the men of faith written about in Hebrews 12 'confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth', and because of that went against governments so that they could maintain their obedience to God's laws.

We're living in a very weird and ungodly world and God won't allow us to duck and cover for ever. Sooner or later we'll all have to stand up for our convictions and prove what we really believe.

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